

1 A studio apartment in New Jersey. FERN, MAC, and GEORGIA drink coffee. Table also contains some notebooks, jar of pencils, pens, markers. Veterans' Day, November 11, 1986.

Fern

There is a carton of butter pecan in there but it's empty.

Mac

He's like a kid. Just like a kid'd do. Put it back empty. I was dying for some. [I'm] not fat enough.

Fern

He's always alone here. Why put it back empty for himself?

Mac

Maybe he had somebody from that church committee up or something. (shakes notebooks, etc.) Witness this committee folderal.

Fern

Parable of the empty ice cream carton. Seek and ye shall find-- nothing.

Georgia (to MAC)

Your mother? When I knew her? "I got my mouth set for it!" she'd always say.

Fern

She set her mouth for about a million desserts. God rest it.

Georgia

They say they're the best, the ones with nuts. The...uh...room
the nuts take? Better than the sugar and all.

Mac (aside)

And the greatest of these is clarity.

Fern

Big fat pecans'll save your life. (Beat) Is it worth it?

Georgia

Hey you get sick of hearing about it. You can't turn around.
They think they got you up against a wall or something. I got
news. I eat what I want.

Fern

Go get 'em Georgia baby!

Mac

I don't need it anyway. That's for sure. Well where's Dad gone
to? Let's get this road on the show.

Georgia

You know.

Fern (to Mac)

You're the one who wants to eat and drink coffee anyway.

Mac

And I'm the one always wants to get going, hey Georgia?

Georgia

It's your brother I knew, Mac, not you.

Mac

So, I'm contradiction. Lots of go and sit on my ass. Life
abounds in in in contradiction and irony. Abounds!

Georgia

Can't tell by me.

Fern

Most of it's predictable. Fashioned by the victim with great neurotic skill.

Mac (a beat)

At any rate, while the old man dandies himself up in there we--

Georgia

It's nice to see him pay attention to hisself. For anybody.
It's a way to--

Mac

never get anywhere!

Fern

There's time...a lifetime.

Mac

Speak for yourself. Better for me [to] try to hurry up a bit.

Georgia

You got older--I mean since I met you that one time with Jimmy.
Years ago now--no offense.

Mac

To me it's been.

Fern

Just have to learn to cool out when it rages.

Mac

Easy for you to say, Fern m'love, but I've worn out. Going,

going, GONE!like Mel Allen said about Yankee homeruns. Anyway, one day you're walking around and the next--

Fern

You're on your knees.

Georgia

You feel that way sometimes.

Mac

That's okay. It's when you don't feel anything else.

Fern

It's an infection. You catch it. From other burnouts. Then you have conferences and workshops when you should've had guts.

Georgia

That's the way [to] get around 'em, huh? All these workshops.

Mac

I'm workshopped out for sure, but I've tried guts too. They can handle anything. Stonewall 'em they go around. Butt against them they slide off like shit.

Georgia

You could retire, turn over a new lease.

Fern

Or something like that.

Mac

Less than four years to go out that window.

Georgia

Window? Why not now? Be my guest.

Mac

Retirement window. It's an expression.

Georgia

I was thinking suicide. What I don't know'd fill a book.

Fern

That's not much.

Mac

And that'lll] make twenty-five years at Terrence Allowell Junior High. Twenty-five! Staggering!

Fern

Don't tell us about it.

Mac

Then I can reach the middle-class Valhalla--standing in line for government cheese.

Georgia

What's good about that is the old ducks can't eat but just a little bit of the cheese, you know, so the middleaged kids visit, go home in the Cadillacs and Olds's with most of it.

Mac

BMW children can't get all the way home.

Fern

At the end of every pipeline a fat, wrong mouth.

Mac (musing)

I voted for that Cheese.

Fern

Ronald Roquefort.

Mac

I was neo-something then--conservative I guess. What's neo mean? Like? I'm always like something.

Fern

It means new which means old.

Georgia

What's your whachacallit...? I never found out.

Mac

Nor did I.

Georgia

Fern?

Fern (to MAC)

Fool! His field is--

Mac

Drug Enforcement. And it should include rubber dispensing. Should.

Georgia

Never mind.

Fern

You're right. Talking to him isn't worth it.

Mac

It used to be. Even for me. Tragic.

Fern

Only when you know what's going on.

Mac

Can't even wring my hands anymore. One can't stand the other.

Fern

'Twas inevitable.

Georgia

After a while you always know, you know. That's the trouble.

Mac

The clowns don't run the circus. That's really the trouble.

Georgia

I aint so sure about that. LOCAL GIRL WONDERS.

Fern

Ma'm?

Mac

Well these clowns don't. This clown. Tumble on cue, ass out of my seedy, schoolmaster pants.

Fern

You should've become a boozier. [It's] the way they think. Self-pity lowered to an art.

Mac

Don't know how I missed it, my sweet Fern. But I always said that art is--

Georgia

Don't teach. It makes me sad.

Fern

I don't know that I did miss it.

Georgia

I can take a drink or leave it alone. Can almost say the same for men.

Mac

Drove through. Mostly.

Fern

Few stops.

Mac

I remember.

Fern

One separation back in there.

Georgia

Didn't know.

Fern

Nearly (a beat) year.

Mac

[That was] for a lot of things.

Georgia

It usually is.

Fern

One prime one. A, uh, Mexican difficulty supplied the, excuse the expression, trigger.

Mac

You can't boil anything down. Anything. You just can't. That's what I found out in all these odd years. And don't I mean odd?

Fern (to MAC)

You can't.

Georgia

What's a Mexican difficulty?

Mac

I say yes to women in combat roles!

Georgia

No thanks. I'll let you know when we get stupid. What's a--?

Mac

Snipers! Wasting us, wasting each other.

Fern

You only hurt--

Mac

the hurt you love.

Georgia

When I'm with husband, wife...they throw it back and forth--
(shrugs, shakes head).

Fern

We better or worse?

Georgia

'Bout the same.

Fern

Marriage toughens people up.

Mac

What doesn't strengthen me kills me.

Fern

You got that right.

Mac

World War Two never officially ended. Let's drink to it.

Georgia

The war or--?

Fern

Any unfinished business.

Mac

Pregnant!

Georgia

Let's hope not. (aside) Spanish fly I heard but Mex-?

Fern

Just a bad episode in our mar--

Mac

Wheels within wheels.

Fern

Bores within bores.

Georgia

You lost me.

Mac

Stay there. You're better off.

Fern

Somebody stirred the wrong pot, a spicy one.

Georgia

You found me.

Mac

Fern!

Fern

Georgia's practically family. Why fart around with secrets?
Deep, deeeeeeeep and dark!

Mac

Forget it--well maybe one more. Another one.

Fern

The Mystery Man.

Georgia

I didn't know he had it in him.

Fern

He didn't either. It may have been his finest hour.

Mac

The woman's way: admire what you condemn. Devastating.
Devastating weapon.

Georgia

We gotta have something.

Fern

It died soon after.

Mac

That was murder.

Fern

We do what we have to, no matter how much it hurts.

Mac

Do tell?

Georgia

That's war too, family war, lover war. So what's the big deal?

Mac

Later.

Fern

How priggish his replies are!

Mac

The old war's quaint, the real one. Old Deuce I mean. It's a black and white movie and even though the guys move at the right speed it's--

Fern

The quaint gassing of Jews.

Georgia

Why don't we change the subjects?

Mac

Even the cold war...that's...it's got that old look.

Fern

Easier to forget we fried our own two then. One a mother. Living color would have prevented that. Sorry, Georgia, I keep tuning up the racist kind of notes.

Georgia

Be my guest. Some of my best friends belong to a race, or are planning to join one after the first of the year. You know, like a diet. You--

Mac

never leave the obvious unsaid. TV influence.

Georgia

You should know.

Fern

Everybody knows. That's why nothing can get done.

Georgia

If you say so.

Mac

Color in Korea but muddy, grainy.

Georgia

It was the whatchacallits, rice paddles.

Fern

But if you watch too long they won't let you watch anymore.

Mac

Huh! More you watch less you know. But Nam brought it home. Didn't it? Whammo! You could smell the fear.

Georgia

Like Monday night football.

Fern

Just don't be a Jew.

Georgia

Live and let live. Anyways I flunked history. They never gave us t-shirts [the] way they do now.

Mac

We try everything.

Fern

We all do. When you don't get a black eye it's a triumph.

Mac

I was only beat up the once.

Fern

Oh? Why haven't you told me about it?--more than a thousand times that is.

Mac

Closer to fifty-eight thousand--a little inside joke.

Georgia

Oh? Another one? Just a gag a minute 'round here.

Mac

Inside me.

Fern

How mysterious.

Mac

You aint seen nothing yet!

Fern

I'm intrigued. At least I think that's what this is.

Mac

In a pitch dark hallway after a dance (muses) the moons of balloons, the heat in the gym like Bataan. Like I said it was pitch dark--all hammering and snorting. I couldn't even tell his race, but I hurt the hell out of his fists.

Fern

The way people pronounce motherfucker says a lot about them. Especially nuns.

Georgia

You are bad, Fern.

Mac

He didn't pronounce anything.

Fern

I read that in Emily Post once.
Georgia

She never came out of the rain.

Mac

Fern or Emily Post?

Georgia

Fern looks dry to me.

Mac

Alas.Fern What's that supposed to mean?

Mac

What a great phrase! Fern!--Georgia too!

Georgia

Thanks.

Mac

It's the great question of our time: What's anything supposed to mean! Not what does it mean but--?

Georgia

We hear you. We hear you.

Mac

Supposed to.

Fern

The teacher teaches till the last classroom dog dies.

Georgia

It's too much for me. Tell me once or forget it.

Mac

I'll remember that. I will. Promise. I really do promise.

Fern

Tiresome. Tedious. Titless.

Mac

Not as I get older. A training bra wouldn't be amiss. The final feminization of the middle aged man in our time: he grows tits.

Fern

Useless, appropriately enough.

Georgia (re Father)

I think he's singing in there.

Fern

That's what happens when you forsake sex for age.

Georgia

I aint ready yet...but I wouldn't mind the whatchacallit, free cheese. (Her joke pleases her)

Mac

He got a snappy cheddar once.

Georgia (a la Mae West)

Just how did it, uh, snap?

Mac (barker)

The incomparable Mae West!

Fern

Might as well get a laugh out of it.

Georgia

Why not?

Mac

Laughter's the name of a station on the way to--what? Tragic Mess?

Fern

More like the one after.

Georgia

What's the choice then? Fuck it. Oh excuse me.

Mac

Apt language needs no excuse.

Fern

Maybe not, but a fuck's out of place in this house.

Mac

I should hope. What would mother say?

Fern

Less than usual--being dead as usual.

Mac

You never know.

Georgia

Out of place? How can you get one out of place?

Fern

Lots of houses really.

Mac

Stop hinting. It's not impotence, it's exhaustion. Deeper today. Deepened today. Ex-haussyss-tion.

Georgia

Never your brother's problem.

Mac

No, he was an enthusiast. Unburdened by deep thoughts.

Georgia

Lot smarter than you think.

Fern Very. Too smart to bother with alleged deep thoughts. Man of instinct in a world of wimpy schemers.

Mac

Well, what'd it get him? Name on a black wall. Wasted in Nam. Well what the hell! He'd be fat and forty now. With a rumbling belly. Popping Tums. Jesus Christ when you think of it!

Georgia

Yeah? And where's your name? Or mine?

Mac

A point. Maybe it was worth it after all.

Fern

Thank God I don't have any children to lose, so fat old men could grow maudlin afterwards while shoveling in the New York Cuts and sucking up champagne.

Mac

We'd go to the wall for that.

Fern

Hah hah.

Georgia

Shit! I'm forty too. I mean also. Almost.

Mac

He thought it was a cause. Jimmy. Or he didn't care. He wasn't one of those against the war, tortured by the ambiguities or--

Fern

A cause my ass! How about Georgia here? Isn't she a cause? How about the babies they might have had? Stupid asshole male word.

Mac

I didn't make the dictionary. I'm not Webster Johnson.

Georgia

I don't know about that. I mean babies I--

Fern

You were planning to get mar--

Georgia

I would've got Jimmy for some more. That's all. You could never think about nothing lasting with him. It wasn't his way.

Mac

Whatever.

Fern

The teacher determines that the subject is barren.

Mac

No, it's Jimmy. Just J--

Fern

And we fire blanks, poor us, while...wanting something he had-- and yet he was some kind of moral idiot.

Mac

Fern!

Fern

All I remember.

Georgia

Different is all. Moral, not moral? (shrugs)

Fern

Whichever foggy memory. We must, at any rate, go look at his name on a stupid wall. Heroes on the mall or below the mall or whatever. And there's naturally controversy, so they put up a statue too, believe it or not. Some found the wall too flatly blackly awful.

Mac

You don't have to go. You or Georgia. I'll just go with Pop and--

Georgia

I'll go along with it if we can get going!

Fern (to Mac:)

Why don't you just move that other ball of fire along?

Mac

Hey give the old fellow a break. He doesn't want the hair from his ears to flare in the sunlight. "Look at the old fart!" they'd say. Listen, you can hear the clip-clip in there.

Fern

You can.

Georgia

It supposed to be one of those days, partly sunny, partly cloudy...I don't know. You listen to that maniac in the morning? The Squirrel Cage? "Hey man! Hey ma'm! Roll your buns out and show em to a gor-gor-gorgeous morning! Catch a wave in that there ole water bed right over your sweet sweet sweet cuh-uh-uhm-puh-LETELY sweet one!" Kills me.

Mac

Too many maniacs have come and gone, some even on FM.

Georgia

Well this one's crazy altogether. I'm in a contest to win a date with him.

Fern

Into each life some fun must rise. It's critical.

Mac

He may well prove to be the sleazy diarrhea mouth of your dreams.

Georgia

Something like that.

Mac

We live in cheap times. I was for all the freedom but it came out ninety percent sleaze. Ninety-nine.

Fern

You never even heard the guy.

Mac

I don't have to. The air is full of bullshit. You just have to listen.

Georgia

I'm listening.

Mac

Or just walk around. It even enters your pores. They'd use their mothers.

Georgia

Finals are wet t-shirt.

Fern

It's a lock.

Mac

I'd be glad to support you.

Fern

But you're afraid to knock on a door. Spreading Romeos have a narrow courage channel. Excuse the flaccid attempt at language.

Georgia

Keep talking. I don't hear it much. Even if it's bad it's good.

Mac (to FERN)

No. (Knocks) Dad, we really should get moving. Might be crowds much later on you know. (to GEORGIA) They're going to have a flag with more than fifty-eight thousand roses.

Georgia

Fifty--?

Mac

One for each.

Fern

How fair.

Georgia

Lot of good guys lost.

Mac

Would you rather be a communist?

Georgia

I don't give a shit.

Mac

The failure of education rears its ugly head once more.

Georgia

Ugly? I don't think I like that.

Fern

Don't you see your life'd be terrible, Georgia? It'd be just the same.

Georgia

So what else is new?

Fern

Rich getting richer equals blood in the streets. Big fat white men never learn. Anywhere. Anytime.

Mac

Fern dropped Political Science. A Republican was mentioned in the textbook.

Georgia

I don't know about all that. But there's one rose for Jimmy. One for Jimmy. (half sob)

Fern

Mama, pin on rose on this country, let it rot and rot there till the stink is unbearable.

Georgia

Who cares 'bout...all that shit? Jimmy is all.

Mac (to FERN)

Try a little less hard. It's a mistake to rely completely on hatred in the personal or the larger life, generally speaking.

Fern

How else? Sorry if we get too--

Georgia

Sure. Hey! Even with lovebirds it aint always singing all the time.

Mac (mutters)

Tell me about it.

Fern

At any rate, getting back to this rock of fundamental values, 'twas nary a sound from the inner sanctum. But a communication

nonetheless between father and son through heavy mahogany.

Mac

He's coming.

Fern

Every family has its quiet madness.

Mac

Every once in a while you get to hear it--but you must listen.

Georgia

It's better. [In] mine they're always screaming.

Fern

There was never screaming here. Uh uh.

Mac

Where the door'd hold it in, not like the cardboard excuses
fordoors in our so-called unit.

Fern

Secrets are the big deal here, of course. Hide the little
things, hide the big things. Who's queer. Who took the last
brownie.

Mac

I got the last brownie so I guess that lets me off the hook. In
our own place you're caught every time. Radar, sonar. I can
see that brownie up on a screen like a geometry example or
something. Blow job be at least a hologram.

Georgia

What's a blow job?

Mac

Unit! Shit! Sounds vaguely Soviet.

Fern

What do you mean vaguely?

Georgia

We are living in the U. S. of A.--last time I looked. But I haven't seen your unit of course.

Mac

You don't know what you're missing.

Fern

So (beat) we're saving our money to build. And we will insist on doors too. Pay the extra. It's worth it.

Mac

Another fiction. They keep raising the prices.

Fern

What do you expect? Got to keep niggers and women and teachers in their place.

Georgia

Not to mention route salespersons. I get an increase sheet every few months it seems like. It's getting so that even in the mom and pop stores I gotta let pop put his hand on my ass when I'm stocking the rack.

Mac

It knows its place.

Fern

Where's mom?

Mac

What!?

Fern

[She's] not keeping up with the times.

Mac

Right! Uh, lucky pop! Oooops, too loud. The old dandy'll think we mean him.

Fern

Almost got caught, didn't you?

Mac

Not for your reasons unfortunately.

Georgia

Got a special on Dandy Cakes if you're interested. And a deal on a batting helmet with the Dandy Cakes whatchacallit, logo.

Fern

He's always interested--or thinks he is.

Mac

I'm not dead yet.

Fern

Just brain dead.

Georgia (distant)

A vegetable might be interesting. SEX WITH A VEGETABLE--a Star exclusive!"

Fern

How about a couch potato? Take him off my hands? Send a future draft choice. Anything that doesn't whine. Dandy, randy, you name it.

Georgia

He's hurt.

Mac

No. Hemingway-macho-boy--that's me. Shoulder to shoulder with Rambo, breaking up fights in the cafeteria, submitting a flawless mimeographed report. All guts and a yard wide.

Fern

At least.

Mac

Wouldn't even know how to complain. 'd need to take lessons no kidding.

Fern

Not any more, king-oh-SAH-bee.

Mac

Girl's college somewhere--that's where the major'd be.

Fern

Hostile bastards of the world unite. You've nothing to lose but--aw hell, you've already lost.

Mac

We just wait, then grab a little back, grab a little back. Little more. Then before you know it--

Georgia

I never got past high school. You know the principle that's enough.

Mac

You got that right.

Georgia

I mean the basic crap.

Fern

Let's just knock off the male-female stuff.

Mac

Hadn't noticed.

Fern

We're hysterical and you guys keep a stiff upper chin: that'll settle it.

Mac

Sometimes I fall quite in love with your nastiness. Still there's a surprise in it even after all this time. You like surprises, too, don't you, Fern?

Fern

No. Yes. Rapturously. They make me gag.

Mac

Your attitudes recall so much. And that so-much in turn--

Georgia

Everything reminds him of something else. How does he do it?

Mac

Thinking. S'called thinking. I think.

Fern

The macho stuff is charming when it's harmless, in situations when it doesn't count. But when the chips are down there has to be some some central you.

Mac

I'm hoping for something. Cause the chips they is down!

Fern

Oh?

Georgia

That wakes me up.

Mac

Forget it for now.

Fern

Forever.

Mac

At any rate, inside every hard-blooded man there's an absolute sweetie. Am I correct?

Georgia

Then how come I meet the absolute pricks? Excuse again. LOSERS WRECK GIRL'S LIFE.

Fern

Don't be a lady here. It's not becoming.

Mac

Anyway, Georgia, you haven't looked inside me yet.

Georgia

Thanks but no thanks. Fern Mac, you're fat and stink of middle-aged desperation. (two beats) So knock off the mawkish flirting.

Georgia

It's okay.

Mac

What else can I do? I'm driven.

Fern

You haven't been driven to anything except butter pecan ice cream in at least two years.

Georgia

Hey, you can turn into that stuff.

Mac

Then I'll devour myself.

Fern

Well, don't flirt first. People want to keep their food down.

Georgia

If you ate yourself your mouth'd have to be left, so you can't. If you think about it you can't do it.

Mac (two beats)

How about them Mets?

Georgia

Ballplayers should never be married. It oughta be against the law.

Mac

Does it stop you?

Georgia

No, but sometimes you think about it.

Fern

A little guilt, a little seasoning.

Georgia

I wouldn't mind the guilt if I didn't worry about it.

Mac

That's Catholic.

Georgia

I don't know what it is.

Fern

It's Georgia.

Georgia

Here Georgia, there Georgia, everywhere everywhere Georgia.

Fern

There may be something in that.

Mac

I don't follow.

Fern

Not like you.

Mac

One mistake I made! Jesus Christ!

Georgia

You must be a saint.

Mac

I have painted the basement stairs. I have tarred, but not feathered, the roof. How much penance is penance?

Fern

That depends on your transgressions, not just the times you're caught.

Mac

You're not interested in the whole picture anyway, just the part you can squeeze and squeeze the ball on.

Fern

People who don't do much make a great, smashing show when they do anything at all.

Mac

Drama! It's the best we can do just running on one ball.

Fern

How painful for you.

Georgia

Stop complaining. You got one left. (laughs)

Mac

Verified. Got in the way last time I fished for the soap.

Georgia

Huh! Men are lucky.

Fern

You take your romance where you can get it I guess.

Georgia

One of those freakin Mets and he was married? Pour my whole stupid heart out, you know? He says "Take two and hit to right." Stinking little--

Mac

You gotta compete with cute little stews forget it.

Georgia

I have, believe me. The prick!

Fern

At any rate, it's good to have something in mind when you negotiate about the grimy basement stairs.

Mac

Nobody sees them. Fern Just you. Just me.

Georgia

I'll look. [I'll] come over some Sunday while you're watching the Giants. Fern and I can exchange Bloody Mary recipes. What color'd you make them?

Mac

What was on sale.

Georgia

What was that?

Mac

I can't remember. We buy everything on sale. There's nothing to contrast it against. (sniffs) Do I sense the magnum Old Spice douse? That's pretty much the last step in a series of about a hundred, right? That means the moment is right.

Fern

Or ripe.

Georgia

To blow this old place.

Mac

Bug out like a big-assed bird

Fern

Haven't heard that for a century at least.

Mac

for a very very interesting and most intriguing stop--
fortunately or unfortunately.

Georgia

I thought we were--?

Fern

Driving straight to the monument. We'd better be.

Mac

Since you're already sitting down--

Georgia

We picking up the president first? At the White House? Poop!
I could've worn my new red frock.

Mac

Mom.

Fern

Uh huh?

Mac

Mother.

Georgia

"Sweetly remembered." [A] card. "From her loving son and
daughter-in-law." Or one of those little ads in the paper?
Little angels and whatchacallits, wreaths: "Departed this world
on--"

Fern

Yeah. Sure. We'll throw her ashes against the black wall.

Georgia

Right! Great whatchcallit? Symbolism. Where's whochacallit?
Walter Cronkite when you need him?

Mac

For better or for worse, only way to say it is to say it.
She's, uh, alive. Mom is.

Georgia

Of course she is. How dumb of me not to know.

Fern

As the judge said, "Bullshit, next case."

Mac

No. Seriously!

Georgia

Now I know you're kidding, [if] you can get THAT word into your
mouth.

Mac

I'm not always fooling around. Can get as grim as life itself.

Georgia

Don't.

Fern

Just cut it out Mac! This is stupid stupid stupid! Don't
always keep straining to come up with perverse jokes. Think of
your blood pressure.

Mac

Called me into the bedroom when we came, threw Georgia out.

Georgia

Too bad. I was only in there a minute but he was beginning to
come on, you know, talk a good game. Old man's tease--you don't

pay no attention. I can always tell when there's something behind that stuff. It's sad. (musing) All these guys thinking they're all cool.

Mac

That's your intellectuality--forged in flirting.

Georgia

If you say so.

Fern

He'll say anything. Tell me it's an idiot lie about Mom. Shit, listen to me! I know it's--

Georgia

Don't get shook up, Fern. You're my whatchacallit, rock.

Mac

Since then [I've been] deciphering what you two've been saying, and all the while trying to think of a way [to] tell--

Georgia

We don't talk in no code. Maybe you do.

Mac

I said it as clearly as I could. You must have questions.

Fern

Uh huh? Yup. Sure! This is too sick even for you, Mac. You might get the butterfly net before your alleged burnout.

Mac

Evidently not for him. Pop. Sick enough that is. She's at Bide a Bit. He put her in there for diet pill addiction.

Fern

I've seen the ashes, anyway the urn, you asshole! I'm not

listening!

Georgia

Be a man, Fern. Listen to the latest load of shit.

Mac

He bought...pretended. And then he...couldn't see a way out. And she evidently decided to go along--in her lucid moments.

Georgia

And the farmer took another load away. I had an uncle always said that. He shook all over when he said it. But that was cause he had gotten sick. I mean not the whatchacallit, subject.

Mac (to GEORGIA)

Even for this crowd you're rattling.

Fern

Uh huh. If it were true you'd be doing the rubber wall routine while tearing out your hair. So knock it off. You had your fun.

Mac

You'd better knock it off to save time. I'm serious. I am serious. I gave you the fact.

Georgia

Just the fact, M'am.

Fern

Let's just get Pop and go!

Mac

That won't change anything. Mother is alive.

Georgia

You're not kidding. He's not kidding. Is he kidding?

Mac

Unfortunately, or fortunately, no. And it's making me sick to my stomach, the whole thing.

Georgia

Got some Malox in my purse.

Fern

[It's making] YOU sick? Even as a joke it's double-ugly. I knew you were a crazy fuckin tribe but--

Georgia

He is kidding. Now he's stuck with it and won't let go. Once you start lying it's murder. Ask an expert.

Mac

Way he explained it, Pop, she she she had this spell and he panicked, you know? And he ran out and telegraphed us on vacation. Mexico. Cause he thought she was dead.

Georgia

Uh huh. Keep it going. My favorite men were liars. (two beats) Think about that for a minute.

Mac

Uh, we, of course, got the message a week and a half late or we didn't look at it if it was delivered before that. Things were a mess you may recall. Sus-suspended animation.

Georgia

MESS IN MEXICO STIRS POT--New York Daily News. ZOMBIES WATCH.

Fern

Shush, Georgia. I want to get to the bottom of this particular loathsome pot. It's not dear dead old mom but it's something.

I know it's something. Something else. Probably just an excuse for some even sicker shit.

Georgia

I'll get my shovel.

Fern

[To] get our attention like a little kid. Like Pop did with his empty ice cream carton.

Mac

Don't I wish!

Georgia (giggles)

WEIRD TEACH SLICES BALONEY ON MOM'S DEATH. No, they'd say exit or something. I'm sorry, Fern, kinda slipped out. I'll behave, but it's hard to when you're into some grim shit or somebody's pulling your leg and you don't know which, you know? Shit. [This is] getting me all excited. Shows you where my life's been. Bore-town.

Mac

When--since I trust you want to listen to more of this, Fern--he got back to the house, uh he had called the undertaker who called the cops for some reason she she was anyway raving at them all by then and kicked and even gouged a couple of cops I'm given to understand, and well--

Fern

Sure. They tried to impound her Godiva Chocolates.

Mac

Go ahead. Keep sticking up your little screens.

Fern

As long as you hold on to your big one.

Georgia

You go ahead, Mac. I'm waiting. This is gonna be my favorite soap opera from now on.

Mac

He had her committed. Some doctor he went to high school with.

Fern

That I would believe. In another context that is. An old boy network to ease the wives out.

Georgia

It's been effective. You should hear the phonecalls I get after they salt 'em away.

Fern

I don't believe a lying word.

Georgia

I'm hurt.

Mac

As you wish. So-o, she was cremated or wasn't cremated in that delay time, before we got or looked at the news sent to us in Mexico. Therefore we missed or didn't miss the funeral, depending on the version you prefer. Maybe there's no difference.

Georgia

Well that much is nice. I mean if you didn't miss, uh, anything anyways, uh--what's that mean? What I just said, I mean? You guys notice if I'm speaking English or not? Let me know, okay?

Fern

I'm slapping myself. Gotta wake up. Don't listen anymore,

Georgia.

He's finally lost it. All that burnout talk wasn't kidding.
Gone!

Mac

That wasn't and this isn't! Now goddammit it's the truth and
let's deal with it!

Fern

Good Jesus! I don't-- If you're not kidding I--
Mac

You're getting there, Fern! Now just hold onto things! Don't
want to lose you. I don't think I can handle everything all by
myself today. We were just going to go to the monument when we
walked into this house.

Georgia

[That was] my dumb understanding.

Mac

That alone'd take the starch from your legs.

Fern

Lose me? You'll be the one lost. [I'll] choke you and your
imbecile father too if-- And I'm not fuckin kidding!

Mac:

He, uh, said that since we had our own troubles when we got back
from Mexico, that he thought that--uh, more convenient to--

Georgia

I'm getting an awful feeling about all of this. Pukey even.

Fern

Oh yes! Leave her dead in our minds. There's a sort of, kind
of, logic. Let's call it that. Logic. Just so we have some
kind, kind of word. We need a word, that's all. It's all
bullshit but if we get the right word we'll get an insight into

the depravity. Maybe into the bullshit too. Or the vile bullshitter. Too bad it's not worth it. Anyway anyway anyway! [if] we get that, that word, we'll...we can take a step. Step! Logic! Perverted, but we can call it that for convenience. Sometimes it's just getting the right word. Straighten out your whole life if--

Mac

He visited her last week and just let it drop we're going to see Jimmy's name on Vietnam Veterans' Wall and she flew into a fit . He had to promise to--

Georgia

I think I remember she liked roses.

Fern

Cut it out! Don't play into his slimy hands.

Georgia

I thought you was kidding too. Still do. Craziest shit I ever heard. What kind of people'd--?

Mac

She mostly doesn't remember anybody, but--

Fern

I'm not listening. There's trouble enough without bullshit. I stopped believing. It won't compute.

Georgia

The bullshit is the trouble.

Mac

Not guilty. Maybe for the first time.

Georgia

I'm beginning to believe you, Mac, but I don't know why. If you wanted to get somebody you got me. So now tell the truth.

Fern

Let's concentrate on poor Jimmy and just forget all this--
Maybe we should buy roses of our own.

Mac

Then you'd have to buy some for Mom too. You know how she is.

Fern Was.

Georgia

Get 'em anyways. I love flowers. (three beats with the women
agitated and MAC in slow shrug)

Fern

We'll...stick 'em in her urn.

1 A studio apartment in New Jersey. FERN, MAC, and
GEORGIA drink coffee. Table also contains some notebooks, jar
of pencils, pens, markers. Veterans' Day, November 11, 1986.

Fern

There is a carton of butter pecan in there but it's empty.

Mac

He's like a kid. Just like a kid'd do. Put it back empty. I
was dying for some. [I'm] not fat enough.

Fern

He's always alone here. Why put it back empty for himself?

Mac

Maybe he had somebody from that church committee up or something. (shakes notebooks, etc.) Witness this committee folderal.

Fern

Parable of the empty ice cream carton. Seek and ye shall find-- nothing.

Georgia (to MAC)

Your mother? When I knew her? "I got my mouth set for it!" she'd always say.

Fern

She set her mouth for about a million desserts. God rest it.

Georgia

They say they're the best, the ones with nuts. The...uh...room the nuts take? Better than the sugar and all.

Mac (aside)

And the greatest of these is clarity.

Fern

Big fat pecans'll save your life. (Beat) Is it worth it?

Georgia

Hey you get sick of hearing about it. You can't turn around. They think they got you up against a wall or something. I got news. I eat what I want.

Fern

Go get 'em Georgia baby!

Mac

I don't need it anyway. That's for sure. Well where's Dad gone to? Let's get this road on the show.

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Georgia

You know.

Fern (to Mac)

You're the one who wants to eat and drink coffee anyway.

Mac

And I'm the one always wants to get going, hey Georgia?

Georgia

It's your brother I knew, Mac, not you.

Mac

So, I'm contradiction. Lots of go and sit on my ass. Life

abounds in in in contradiction and irony. Abounds!

Georgia

Can't tell by me.

Fern

Most of it's predictable. Fashioned by the victim with great neurotic skill.

Mac (a beat)

At any rate, while the old man dandies himself up in there we--

Georgia

It's nice to see him pay attention to hisself. For anybody.
It's a way to--

Mac

never get anywhere!

Fern

There's time...a lifetime.

Mac

Speak for yourself. Better for me [to] try to hurry up a bit.

Georgia

You got older--I mean since I met you that one time with Jimmy.
Years ago now--no offense.

Mac

To me it's been.

Fern

Just have to learn to cool out when it rages.

Mac

Easy for you to say, Fern m'love, but I've worn out. Going, going, GONE!like Mel Allen said about Yankee homeruns. Anyway, one day you're walking around and the next--

Fern

You're on your knees.

Georgia

You feel that way sometimes.

Mac

That's okay. It's when you don't feel anything else.

Fern

It's an infection. You catch it. From other burnouts. Then you have conferences and workshops when you should've had guts.

Georgia

That's the way [to] get around 'em, huh? All these workshops.

Mac

I'm workshopped out for sure, but I've tried guts too. They can handle anything. Stonewall 'em they go around. Butt against them they slide off like shit.

Georgia

You could retire, turn over a new lease.

Fern

Or something like that.

Mac

Less than four years to go out that window.

Georgia

Window? Why not now? Be my guest.

Mac

Retirement window. It's an expression.

Georgia

I was thinking suicide. What I don't know'd fill a book.

Fern

That's not much.

Mac

And that'll] make twenty-five years at Terrence Allowell Junior High. Twenty-five! Staggering!

Fern

Don't tell us about it.

Mac

Then I can reach the middle-class Valhalla--standing in line for government cheese.

Georgia

What's good about that is the old ducks can't eat but just a little bit of the cheese, you know, so the middleaged kids visit, go home in the Cadillacs and Olds's with most of it.

Mac

BMW children can't get all the way home.

Fern

At the end of every pipeline a fat, wrong mouth.

Mac (musing)

I voted for that Cheese.

Fern

Ronald Roquefort.

Mac

I was neo-something then--conservative I guess. What's neo mean? Like? I'm always like something.

Fern

It means new which means old.

Georgia

What's your whachacallit...? I never found out.

Mac

Nor did I.

Georgia

Fern?

Fern (to MAC)

Fool! His field is--

Mac

Drug Enforcement. And it should include rubber dispensing. Should.

Georgia

Never mind.

Fern

You're right. Talking to him isn't worth it.

Mac

It used to be. Even for me. Tragic.

Fern

Only when you know what's going on.

Mac

Can't even wring my hands anymore. One can't stand the other.

Fern

'Twas inevitable.

Georgia

After a while you always know, you know. That's the trouble.

Mac

The clowns don't run the circus. That's really the trouble.

Georgia

I aint so sure about that. LOCAL GIRL WONDERS.

Fern

Ma'm?

Mac

Well these clowns don't. This clown. Tumble on cue, ass out of my seedy, schoolmaster pants.

Fern

You should've become a boozier. [It's] the way they think. Self-pity lowered to an art.

Mac

Don't know how I missed it, my sweet Fern. But I always said that art is--

Georgia

Don't teach. It makes me sad.

Fern

I don't know that I did miss it.

Georgia

I can take a drink or leave it alone. Can almost say the same for men.

Mac

Drove through. Mostly.

Fern

Few stops.

Mac

I remember.

Fern

One separation back in there.

Georgia

Didn't know.

Fern

Nearly (a beat) year.

Mac

[That was] for a lot of things.

Georgia

It usually is.

Fern

One prime one. A, uh, Mexican difficulty supplied the, excuse the expression, trigger.

Mac

You can't boil anything down. Anything. You just can't. That's what I found out in all these odd years. And don't I mean odd?

Fern (to MAC)

You can't.

Georgia

What's a Mexican difficulty?

Mac

I say yes to women in combat roles!

Georgia

No thanks. I'll let you know when we get stupid. What's a--?

Mac

Snipers! Wasting us, wasting each other.

Fern

You only hurt--

Mac

the hurt you love.

Georgia

When I'm with husband, wife...they throw it back and forth--
(shrugs, shakes head).

Fern

We better or worse?

Georgia

'Bout the same.

Fern

Marriage toughens people up.

Mac

What doesn't strengthen me kills me.

Fern

You got that right.

Mac

World War Two never officially ended. Let's drink to it.

Georgia

The war or--?

Fern

Any unfinished business.

Mac

Pregnant!

Georgia

Let's hope not. (aside) Spanish fly I heard but Mex-?

Fern

Just a bad episode in our mar--

Mac

Wheels within wheels.

Fern

Bores within bores.

Georgia

You lost me.

Mac

Stay there. You're better off.

Fern
Somebody stirred the wrong pot, a spicy one.

Georgia
You found me.

Mac
Fern!

Fern
Georgia's practically family. Why fart around with secrets?
Deep, deeeeeeeep and dark!

Mac
Forget it--well maybe one more. Another one.

Fern
The Mystery Man.

Georgia
I didn't know he had it in him.

Fern
He didn't either. It may have been his finest hour.

Mac
The woman's way: admire what you condemn. Devastating.
Devastating weapon.

Georgia
We gotta have something.

Fern
It died soon after.

Mac

That was murder.

Fern

We do what we have to, no matter how much it hurts.

Mac

Do tell?

Georgia

That's war too, family war, lover war. So what's the big deal?

Mac

Later.

Fern

How priggish his replies are!

Mac

The old war's quaint, the real one. Old Deuce I mean. It's a black and white movie and even though the guys move at the right speed it's--

Fern

The quaint gassing of Jews.

Georgia

Why don't we change the subjects?

Mac

Even the cold war...that's...it's got that old look.

Fern

Easier to forget we fried our own two then. One a mother. Living color would have prevented that. Sorry, Georgia, I keep tuning up the racist kind of notes.

Georgia

Be my guest. Some of my best friends belong to a race, or are planning to join one after the first of the year. You know, like a diet. You--

Mac

never leave the obvious unsaid. TV influence.

Georgia

You should know.

Fern

Everybody knows. That's why nothing can get done.

Georgia

If you say so.

Mac

Color in Korea but muddy, grainy.

Georgia

It was the whatchacallits, rice paddles.

Fern

But if you watch too long they won't let you watch anymore.

Mac

Huh! More you watch less you know. But Nam brought it home. Didn't it? Whammo! You could smell the fear.

Georgia

Like Monday night football.

Fern

Just don't be a Jew.

Georgia

Live and let live. Anyways I flunked history. They never gave us t-shirts [the] way they do now.

Mac

We try everything.

Fern

We all do. When you don't get a black eye it's a triumph.

Mac

I was only beat up the once.

Fern

Oh? Why haven't you told me about it?--more than a thousand times that is.

Mac

Closer to fifty-eight thousand--a little inside joke.

Georgia

Oh? Another one? Just a gag a minute 'round here.

Mac

Inside me.

Fern

How mysterious.

Mac

You aint seen nothing yet!

Fern

I'm intrigued. At least I think that's what this is.

Mac

In a pitch dark hallway after a dance (muses) the moons of balloons, the heat in the gym like Bataan. Like I said it was pitch dark--all hammering and snorting. I couldn't even tell his race, but I hurt the hell out of his fists.

Fern

The way people pronounce motherfucker says a lot about them. Especially nuns.

Georgia

You are bad, Fern.

Mac

He didn't pronounce anything.

Fern

I read that in Emily Post once.

Georgia

She never came out of the rain.

Mac

Fern or Emily Post?

Georgia

Fern looks dry to me.

Mac

Alas.Fern What's that supposed to mean?

Mac

What a great phrase! Fern!--Georgia too!

Georgia

Thanks.

Mac

It's the great question of our time: What's anything supposed to mean! Not what does it mean but--?

Georgia

We hear you. We hear you.

Mac

Supposed to.

Fern

The teacher teaches till the last classroom dog dies.

Georgia

It's too much for me. Tell me once or forget it.

Mac

I'll remember that. I will. Promise. I really do promise.

Fern

Tiresome. Tedious. Titless.

Mac

Not as I get older. A training bra wouldn't be amiss. The final feminization of the middle aged man in our time: he grows tits.

Fern

Useless, appropriately enough.

Georgia (re Father)

I think he's singing in there.

Fern

That's what happens when you forsake sex for age.

Georgia

I aint ready yet...but I wouldn't mind the whatchacallit, free cheese. (Her joke pleases her)

Mac

He got a snappy cheddar once.

Georgia (a la Mae West)

Just how did it, uh, snap?

Mac (barker)

The incomparable Mae West!

Fern

Might as well get a laugh out of it.

Georgia

Why not?

Mac

Laughter's the name of a station on the way to--what? Tragic Mess?

Fern

More like the one after.

Georgia

What's the choice then? Fuck it. Oh excuse me.

Mac

Apt language needs no excuse.

Fern

Maybe not, but a fuck's out of place in this house.

Mac

I should hope. What would mother say?

Fern

Less than usual--being dead as usual.

Mac

You never know.

Georgia

Out of place? How can you get one out of place?

Fern

Lots of houses really.

Mac

Stop hinting. It's not impotence, it's exhaustion. Deeper today. Deepened today. Ex-haousssss-tion.

Georgia

Never your brother's problem.

Mac

No, he was an enthusiast. Unburdened by deep thoughts.

Georgia

Lot smarter than you think.

Fern Very. Too smart to bother with alleged deep thoughts. Man of instinct in a world of wimpy schemers.

Mac

Well, what'd it get him? Name on a black wall. Wasted in Nam. Well what the hell! He'd be fat and forty now. With a rumbling belly. Popping Tums. Jesus Christ when you think of it!

Georgia

Yeah? And where's your name? Or mine?

Mac

A point. Maybe it was worth it after all.

Fern

Thank God I don't have any children to lose, so fat old men could grow maudlin afterwards while shoveling in the New York Cuts and sucking up champagne.

Mac

We'd go to the wall for that.

Fern

Hah hah.

Georgia

Shit! I'm forty too. I mean also. Almost.

Mac

He thought it was a cause. Jimmy. Or he didn't care. He wasn't one of those against the war, tortured by the ambiguities or--

Fern

A cause my ass! How about Georgia here? Isn't she a cause? How about the babies they might have had? Stupid asshole male word.

Mac

I didn't make the dictionary. I'm not Webster Johnson.

Georgia

I don't know about that. I mean babies I--

Fern

You were planning to get mar--

Georgia

I would've got Jimmy for some more. That's all. You could never think about nothing lasting with him. It wasn't his way.

Mac

Whatever.

Fern

The teacher determines that the subject is barren.

Mac

No, it's Jimmy. Just J--

Fern

And we fire blanks, poor us, while...wanting something he had-- and yet he was some kind of moral idiot.

Mac

Fern!

Fern

All I remember.

Georgia

Different is all. Moral, not moral? (shrugs)

Fern

Whichever foggy memory. We must, at any rate, go look at his name on a stupid wall. Heroes on the mall or below the mall or whatever. And there's naturally controversy, so they put up a statue too, believe it or not. Some found the wall too flatly blackly awful.

Mac

You don't have to go. You or Georgia. I'll just go with Pop

and--

Georgia
I'll go along with it if we can get going!

Fern (to Mac:)

Why don't you just move that other ball of fire along?

Mac

Hey give the old fellow a break. He doesn't want the hair from his ears to flare in the sunlight. "Look at the old fart!" they'd say. Listen, you can hear the clip-clip in there.

Fern

You can.

Georgia

It supposed to be one of those days, partly sunny, partly cloudy...I don't know. You listen to that maniac in the morning? The Squirrel Cage? "Hey man! Hey ma'm! Roll your buns out and show em to a gor-gor-gorgeous morning! Catch a wave in that there ole water bed right over your sweet sweet sweet cuh-uh-uhm-puh-LETELY sweet one!" Kills me.

Mac

Too many maniacs have come and gone, some even on FM.

Georgia

Well this one's crazy altogether. I'm in a contest to win a date with him.

Fern

Into each life some fun must rise. It's critical.

Mac

He may well prove to be the sleazy diarrhea mouth of your dreams.

Georgia

Something like that.

Mac

We live in cheap times. I was for all the freedom but it came out ninety percent sleaze. Ninety-nine.

Fern

You never even heard the guy.

Mac

I don't have to. The air is full of bullshit. You just have to listen.

Georgia

I'm listening.

Mac

Or just walk around. It even enters your pores. They'd use their mothers.

Georgia

Finals are wet t-shirt.

Fern

It's a lock.

Mac

I'd be glad to support you.

Fern

But you're afraid to knock on a door. Spreading Romeos have a narrow courage channel. Excuse the flaccid attempt at language.

Georgia

Keep talking. I don't hear it much. Even if it's bad it's

good.

Mac (to FERN)

No. (Knocks) Dad, we really should get moving. Might be crowds much later on you know. (to GEORGIA) They're going to have a flag with more than fifty-eight thousand roses.

Georgia

Fifty--?

Mac

One for each.

Fern

How fair.

Georgia

Lot of good guys lost.

Mac

Would you rather be a communist?

Georgia

I don't give a shit.

Mac

The failure of education rears its ugly head once more.

Georgia

Ugly? I don't think I like that.

Fern

Don't you see your life'd be terrible, Georgia? It'd be just the same.

Georgia

So what else is new?

Fern

Rich getting richer equals blood in the streets. Big fat white men never learn. Anywhere. Anytime.

Mac

Fern dropped Political Science. A Republican was mentioned in the textbook.

Georgia

I don't know about all that. But there's one rose for Jimmy. One for Jimmy. (half sob)

Fern

Mama, pin on rose on this country, let it rot and rot there till the stink is unbearable.

Georgia

Who cares 'bout...all that shit? Jimmy is all.

Mac (to FERN)

Try a little less hard. It's a mistake to rely completely on hatred in the personal or the larger life, generally speaking.

Fern

How else? Sorry if we get too--

Georgia

Sure. Hey! Even with lovebirds it aint always singing all the time.

Mac (mutters)

Tell me about it.

Fern

At any rate, getting back to this rock of fundamental values,

'twas nary a sound from the inner sanctum. But a communication nonetheless between father and son through heavy mahogany.

Mac

He's coming.

Fern

Every family has its quiet madness.

Mac

Every once in a while you get to hear it--but you must listen.

Georgia

It's better. [In] mine they're always screaming.

Fern

There was never screaming here. Uh uh.

Mac

Where the door'd hold it in, not like the cardboard excuses for doors in our so-called unit.

Fern

Secrets are the big deal here, of course. Hide the little things, hide the big things. Who's queer. Who took the last brownie.

Mac

I got the last brownie so I guess that lets me off the hook. In our own place you're caught every time. Radar, sonar. I can see that brownie up on a screen like a geometry example or something. Blow job be at least a hologram.

Georgia

What's a blow job?

Mac

Unit! Shit! Sounds vaguely Soviet.

Fern

What do you mean vaguely?

Georgia

We are living in the U. S. of A.--last time I looked. But I haven't seen your unit of course.

Mac

You don't know what you're missing.

Fern

So (beat) we're saving our money to build. And we will insist on doors too. Pay the extra. It's worth it.

Mac

Another fiction. They keep raising the prices.

Fern

What do you expect? Got to keep niggers and women and teachers in their place.

Georgia

Not to mention route salespersons. I get an increase sheet every few months it seems like. It's getting so that even in the mom and pop stores I gotta let pop put his hand on my ass when I'm stocking the rack.

Mac

It knows its place.

Fern

Where's mom?

Mac

What!?

Fern

[She's] not keeping up with the times.

Mac

Right! Uh, lucky pop! Oooops, too loud. The old dandy'll think we mean him.

Fern

Almost got caught, didn't you?

Mac

Not for your reasons unfortunately.

Georgia

Got a special on Dandy Cakes if you're interested. And a deal on a batting helmet with the Dandy Cakes whatchacallit, logo.

Fern

He's always interested--or thinks he is.

Mac

I'm not dead yet.

Fern

Just brain dead.

Georgia (distant)

A vegetable might be interesting. SEX WITH A VEGETABLE--a Star exclusive!"

Fern

How about a couch potato? Take him off my hands? Send a future draft choice. Anything that doesn't whine. Dandy, randy, you name it.

Georgia

He's hurt.

Mac

No. Hemingway-macho-boy--that's me. Shoulder to shoulder with Rambo, breaking up fights in the cafeteria, submitting a flawless mimeographed report. All guts and a yard wide.

Fern

At least.

Mac

Wouldn't even know how to complain. 'd need to take lessons no kidding.

Fern

Not any more, king-oh-SAH-bee.

Mac

Girl's college somewhere--that's where the major'd be.

Fern

Hostile bastards of the world unite. You've nothing to lose but--aw hell, you've already lost.

Mac

We just wait, then grab a little back, grab a little back. Little more. Then before you know it--

Georgia

I never got past high school. You know the principle that's enough.

Mac

You got that right.

Georgia

I mean the basic crap.

Fern

Let's just knock off the male-female stuff.

Mac

Hadn't noticed.

Fern

We're hysterical and you guys keep a stiff upper chin: that'll settle it.

Mac

Sometimes I fall quite in love with your nastiness. Still there's a surprise in it even after all this time. You like surprises, too, don't you, Fern?

Fern

No. Yes. Rapturously. They make me gag.

Mac

Your attitudes recall so much. And that so-much in turn--

Georgia

Everything reminds him of something else. How does he do it?

Mac

Thinking. S'called thinking. I think.

Fern

The macho stuff is charming when it's harmless, in situations when it doesn't count. But when the chips are down there has to be some some central you.

Mac

I'm hoping for something. Cause the chips they is down!

Fern

Oh?

Georgia

That wakes me up.

Mac

Forget it for now.

Fern

Forever.

Mac

At any rate, inside every hard-blooded man there's an absolute sweetie. Am I correct?

Georgia

Then how come I meet the absolute pricks? Excuse again. LOSERS WRECK GIRL'S LIFE.

Fern

Don't be a lady here. It's not becoming.

Mac

Anyway, Georgia, you haven't looked inside me yet.

Georgia

Thanks but no thanks. Fern Mac, you're fat and stink of middle-aged desperation. (two beats) So knock off the mawkish flirting.

Georgia

It's okay.

Mac

What else can I do? I'm driven.

Fern

You haven't been driven to anything except butter pecan ice cream in at least two years.

Georgia

Hey, you can turn into that stuff.

Mac

Then I'll devour myself.

Fern

Well, don't flirt first. People want to keep their food down.

Georgia

If you ate yourself your mouth'd have to be left, so you can't. If you think about it you can't do it.

Mac (two beats)

How about them Mets?

Georgia

Ballplayers should never be married. It oughta be against the law.

Mac

Does it stop you?

Georgia

No, but sometimes you think about it.

Fern

A little guilt, a little seasoning.

Georgia

I wouldn't mind the guilt if I didn't worry about it.

Mac

That's Catholic.

Georgia

I don't know what it is.

Fern

It's Georgia.

Georgia

Here Georgia, there Georgia, everywhere everywhere Georgia.

Fern

There may be something in that.

Mac

I don't follow.

Fern

Not like you.

Mac

One mistake I made! Jesus Christ!

Georgia

You must be a saint.

Mac

I have painted the basement stairs. I have tarred, but not feathered, the roof. How much penance is penance?

Fern

That depends on your transgressions, not just the times you're caught.

Mac

You're not interested in the whole picture anyway, just the part you can squeeze and squeeze the ball on.

Fern

People who don't do much make a great, smashing show when they do anything at all.

Mac

Drama! It's the best we can do just running on one ball.

Fern

How painful for you.

Georgia

Stop complaining. You got one left. (laughs)

Mac

Verified. Got in the way last time I fished for the soap.

Georgia

Huh! Men are lucky.

Fern

You take your romance where you can get it I guess.

Georgia

One of those freakin Mets and he was married? Pour my whole stupid heart out, you know? He says "Take two and hit to right." Stinking little--

Mac

You gotta compete with cute little stews forget it.

Georgia

I have, believe me. The prick!

Fern

At any rate, it's good to have something in mind when you negotiate about the grimy basement stairs.

Mac

Nobody sees them. Fern Just you. Just me.

Georgia

I'll look. [I'll] come over some Sunday while you're watching the Giants. Fern and I can exchange Bloody Mary recipes. What color'd you make them?

Mac

What was on sale.

Georgia

What was that?

Mac

I can't remember. We buy everything on sale. There's nothing to contrast it against. (sniffs) Do I sense the magnum Old Spice douse? That's pretty much the last step in a series of about a hundred, right? That means the moment is right.

Fern

Or ripe.

Georgia

To blow this old place.

Mac

Bug out like a big-assed bird

Fern

Haven't heard that for a century at least.

Mac

for a very very interesting and most intriguing stop--
fortunately or unfortunately.

Georgia

I thought we were--?

Fern

Driving straight to the monument. We'd better be.

Mac

Since you're already sitting down--

Georgia

We picking up the president first? At the White House? Poop!
I could've worn my new red frock.

Mac

Mom.

Fern

Uh huh?

Mac

Mother.

Georgia

"Sweetly remembered." [A] card. "From her loving son and
daughter-in-law." Or one of those little ads in the paper?
Little angels and whatchacallits, wreaths: "Departed this world
on--"

Fern

Yeah. Sure. We'll throw her ashes against the black wall.

Georgia

Right! Great whatchacallit? Symbolism. Where's whochacallit?
Walter Cronkite when you need him?

Mac

For better or for worse, only way to say it is to say it.
She's, uh, alive. Mom is.

Georgia

Of course she is. How dumb of me not to know.

Fern

As the judge said, "Bullshit, next case."

Mac

No. Seriously!

Georgia

Now I know you're kidding, [if] you can get THAT word into your
mouth.

Mac

I'm not always fooling around. Can get as grim as life itself.

Georgia

Don't.

Fern

Just cut it out Mac! This is stupid stupid stupid! Don't
always keep straining to come up with perverse jokes. Think of
your blood pressure.

Mac

Called me into the bedroom when we came, threw Georgia out.

Georgia

Too bad. I was only in there a minute but he was beginning to

come on, you know, talk a good game. Old man's tease--you don't pay no attention. I can always tell when there's something behind that stuff. It's sad. (musing) All these guys thinking they're all cool.

Mac

That's your intellectuality--forged in flirting.

Georgia

If you say so.

Fern

He'll say anything. Tell me it's an idiot lie about Mom. Shit, listen to me! I know it's--

Georgia

Don't get shook up, Fern. You're my whatchacallit, rock.

Mac

Since then [I've been] deciphering what you two've been saying, and all the while trying to think of a way [to] tell--

Georgia

We don't talk in no code. Maybe you do.

Mac

I said it as clearly as I could. You must have questions.

Fern

Uh huh? Yup. Sure! This is too sick even for you, Mac. You might get the butterfly net before your alleged burnout.

Mac

Evidently not for him. Pop. Sick enough that is. She's at Bide a Bit. He put her in there for diet pill addiction.

Fern

I've seen the ashes, anyway the urn, you asshole! I'm not listening!

Georgia

Be a man, Fern. Listen to the latest load of shit.

Mac

He bought...pretended. And then he...couldn't see a way out. And she evidently decided to go along--in her lucid moments.

Georgia

And the farmer took another load away. I had an uncle always said that. He shook all over when he said it. But that was cause he had gotten sick. I mean not the whatchacallit, subject.

Mac (to GEORGIA)

Even for this crowd you're rattling.

Fern

Uh huh. If it were true you'd be doing the rubber wall routine while tearing out your hair. So knock it off. You had your fun.

Mac

You'd better knock it off to save time. I'm serious. I am serious. I gave you the fact.

Georgia

Just the fact, M'am.

Fern

Let's just get Pop and go!

Mac

That won't change anything. Mother is alive.

Georgia

You're not kidding. He's not kidding. Is he kidding?

Mac

Unfortunately, or fortunately, no. And it's making me sick to my stomach, the whole thing.

Georgia

Got some Malox in my purse.

Fern

[It's making] YOU sick? Even as a joke it's double-ugly. I knew you were a crazy fuckin tribe but--

Georgia

He is kidding. Now he's stuck with it and won't let go. Once you start lying it's murder. Ask an expert.

Mac

Way he explained it, Pop, she she she had this spell and he panicked, you know? And he ran out and telegraphed us on vacation. Mexico. Cause he thought she was dead.

Georgia

Uh huh. Keep it going. My favorite men were liars. (two beats) Think about that for a minute.

Mac

Uh, we, of course, got the message a week and a half late or we didn't look at it if it was delivered before that. Things were a mess you may recall. Sus-suspended animation.

Georgia

MESS IN MEXICO STIRS POT--New York Daily News. ZOMBIES WATCH.

Fern

Shush, Georgia. I want to get to the bottom of this particular

loathsome pot. It's not dear dead old mom but it's something. I know it's something. Something else. Probably just an excuse for some even sicker shit.

Georgia

I'll get my shovel.

Fern

[To] get our attention like a little kid. Like Pop did with his empty ice cream carton.

Mac

Don't I wish!

Georgia (giggles)

WEIRD TEACH SLICES BALONEY ON MOM'S DEATH. No, they'd say exit or something. I'm sorry, Fern, kinda slipped out. I'll behave, but it's hard to when you're into some grim shit or somebody's pulling your leg and you don't know which, you know? Shit. [This is] getting me all excited. Shows you where my life's been. Bore-town.

Mac

When--since I trust you want to listen to more of this, Fern--he got back to the house, uh he had called the undertaker who called the cops for some reason she she she was anyway raving at them all by then and kicked and even gouged a couple of cops I'm given to understand, and well--

Fern

Sure. They tried to impound her Godiva Chocolates.

Mac

Go ahead. Keep sticking up your little screens.

Fern

As long as you hold on to your big one.

Georgia

You go ahead, Mac. I'm waiting. This is gonna be my favorite soap opera from now on.

Mac

He had her committed. Some doctor he went to high school with.

Fern

That I would believe. In another context that is. An old boy network to ease the wives out.

Georgia

It's been effective. You should hear the phonecalls I get after they salt 'em away.

Fern

I don't believe a lying word.

Georgia

I'm hurt.

Mac

As you wish. So-o, she was cremated or wasn't cremated in that delay time, before we got or looked at the news sent to us in Mexico. Therefore we missed or didn't miss the funeral, depending on the version you prefer. Maybe there's no difference.

Georgia

Well that much is nice. I mean if you didn't miss, uh, anything anyways, uh--what's that mean? What I just said, I mean? You guys notice if I'm speaking English or not? Let me know, okay?

Fern

I'm slapping myself. Gotta wake up. Don't listen anymore,

Georgia.

He's finally lost it. All that burnout talk wasn't kidding.
Gone!

Mac

That wasn't and this isn't! Now goddammit it's the truth and
let's deal with it!

Fern

Good Jesus! I don't-- If you're not kidding I--
Mac

You're getting there, Fern! Now just hold onto things! Don't
want to lose you. I don't think I can handle everything all by
myself today. We were just going to go to the monument when we
walked into this house.

Georgia

[That was] my dumb understanding.

Mac

That alone'd take the starch from your legs.

Fern

Lose me? You'll be the one lost. [I'll] choke you and your
imbecile father too if-- And I'm not fuckin kidding!

Mac:

He, uh, said that since we had our own troubles when we got back
from Mexico, that he thought that--uh, more convenient to--

Georgia

I'm getting an awful feeling about all of this. Pukey even.

Fern

Oh yes! Leave her dead in our minds. There's a sort of, kind
of, logic. Let's call it that. Logic. Just so we have some
kind, kind of word. We need a word, that's all. It's all

bullshit but if we get the right word we'll get an insight into the depravity. Maybe into the bullshit too. Or the vile bullshitter. Too bad it's not worth it. Anyway anyway anyway! [if] we get that, that word, we'll...we can take a step. Step! Logic! Perverted, but we can call it that for convenience. Sometimes it's just getting the right word. Straighten out your whole life if--

Mac

He visited her last week and just let it drop we're going to see Jimmy's name on Vietnam Veterans' Wall and she flew into a fit . He had to promise to--

Georgia

I think I remember she liked roses.

Fern

Cut it out! Don't play into his slimy hands.

Georgia

I thought you was kidding too. Still do. Craziest shit I ever heard. What kind of people'd--?

Mac

She mostly doesn't remember anybody, but--

Fern

I'm not listening. There's trouble enough without bullshit. I stopped believing. It won't compute.

Georgia

The bullshit is the trouble.

Mac

Not guilty. Maybe for the first time.

Georgia

I'm beginning to believe you, Mac, but I don't know why. If you

wanted to get somebody you got me. So now tell the truth.

Fern

Let's concentrate on poor Jimmy and just forget all this--
Maybe we should buy roses of our own.

Mac

Then you'd have to buy some for Mom too. You know how she is.

Fern Was.

Georgia

Get 'em anyways. I love flowers. (three beats with the women
agitated and MAC in slow shrug)

Fern

We'll...stick 'em in her urn.

Georgia

Georgia

Jimmy! There's so much I can talk to her about now--I mean
about him as a kid.

Fern

Georgia! Don't you know that he--?

Mac

Her doctor thinks it may be key. Jim.

Fern

Key? No key to a madhouse. I concluded that long ago. But,
again, let's just back right up, Mac. You have definitely had
us on. All right? Best job you've ever done in fact. You

demonstrate talent in that arena. Mix in a little cruelty, more than a little, you come up to the top of your sickening form.

Georgia

Super Bowl of Assholes!

Mac

Why thank you both. But I don't deserve it.

Georgia

Be a kick meeting her again after all these years. Or would be. Shit, listen to me! Come on somebody! Tell the freakin truth! I'll start chewing my nails again and I broke it. Excuse me, Fern, I'm sorry but I think I believe him. It's just crazy is all. Big Crazy, but crazy I can figure out. Habit I mean, biting nails, kicked the habit.

Mac

I've been kicked. Believe me.

Fern

You aint seen nothing yet! Now I want it stopped now! It's tense anyway without this, this, this insanity! Way out of hand!

Georgia

Why blame Mac? It's that old churchmouse in there.

Fern

All right. I'm sick of this. I'll call the bluff and right now! I'll fuckin call it all right!

Georgia

You sure got a fire goin' under her vocabulary.

Fern

I've got to get this this this QUARTER-assed explanation again,

and then I want to phone the doctor at Bide a Bit, and then Georgia's right and I am going to murder that incompetent asshole slicking down his few hairs in there if any of this shit is true.

Georgia

You'd be acquitted. Mercy Killing. "TV News 2 reporting from a modest house on--"

Fern

But you'll stop me before your fraud is uncovered. I know you.

Mac

It's taken a lot out of him to finally own up. Years grew into each other and she got sicker I guess. He surely wanted to tell us earlier.

Georgia

Five years aint much as these things go.

Fern

Not much?! These things?! What things?!

Georgia

I don't know. Could've gone on longer. Why not? Anything could.

Fern

He...telegraphed us in Mexico--? Five? years ago.

Mac

It was a mess then and we both know it, mostly my fault--

Georgia

Fuck that shit now. It fades into whatchacallit, insignificance. Nooky and tortillas. Who cares? It's no big deal anymore.

Mac

but the present mess is a little bit our fault too. We we didn't seem receptive I guess. Or he would've told--

Georgia

Waiting for the right moment.

Fern

Receptive? Receptive? You're as crazy as he is! (breaks into shaking, sobbing fit)

Georgia

Now see what you've done? True or not, it's far enough to take your stupid--

Mac

I had a duty. People get hurt. It can't be helped.

Georgia

Tell me about it. I'm all for you guys doin' your kind of duty--about four thousand miles away from me.

Fern

I can't believe such a thing. My mind refuses to believe such a thing. It cannot hold it! It-- Nobody says his wife died and then--

Georgia

A first. Guinness Book.

Mac

Come on now. Try to get ahold of yourself, Fern. You can get used to anything.

Georgia

Been spying on me again.

Fern

Sure! Sure! Resilient! Get smashed to shit forever and ever and that's what they call it! I'd go [if I] had legs left. I'd get the hell out of here and never come back. Never! You'd never see stupid Fern a--

Mac

Yelling doesn't help, Honey.

Georgia

Speaking of getting used to things? Don't I know it? Shit I've gotten used to so much. But this one's a special category, don't you think? Mac? Especially to ole Fern here.

Mac

Yeah it is, but you've gotta think about how a person can actually dig himself in, and not know how to-- I mean a private person like Pop. Hey! It's not only possible, it fuckin happened!

Georgia

That's too private, but, I don't know. I know it's stupid but I feel better about things. Jimmy--I don't know--Jimmy's got a mama.

Fern (sobs)

It touches you.

Mac

Right. And that's good!

Fern

You let it touch you [it] makes you crazy. Rips and rips and you can't get away from it! You can't help it. It's not your fault. It isn't my fault! It isn't my fault!

Mac

And who the hell said--?

Georgia

What the hell?

Mac

I'll (a beat) grant you that it's disturbing. But why be a martyr over a couple of old fools? We anyway gotta start living with it. And the sooner--

Fern

Disturb--?

Georgia (with photo album)

I'm gonna bring this and ask her. We can talk all the way to D. C.

Mac

Good. That should help break the ice.

Fern

Ice. Polar. Family. Jesus Christ! How many years?

Georgia

Five. We've already said. Coffee, Fern? You had coffee. How bout tea? Pop--

Fern

Ugh!

Georgia

got one of those kinds for the nerves? Mac?!

Fern

Both fuckin batty.

Mac

I'll ge[t]-- Fern? Tea? (waits for response) Gotta get back to everyday, Honey. Routine--I don't know--stops everything from, from from shaking loose.
Fern Loose. Holy shit. Loose. Loose. F-f-f-f-f-fuckin loose.

Mac

That's right.

Georgia

I'm looking for ones where you're together, you and Jimmy.

Mac

It's bad, awful bad, Honey, but this is our opportunity to come to grips with it. Don't the Chines have terro and oppoortunity in the same character?

Georgia

Hey! Intellectsmintellect! Proof of the pudding's at Bide a Bit. I'm sick of all the talk. Fuckin happy I never got to college. Not as a student anyways--climbed some drainpipes.

Fern

Jesus Christ don't rattle!

Mac Now let's not make a federal case.

Georgia

Here's, uh, one of Mom, must be before she went in. Fat. I can see the diet pills.

Mac

In the picture?

Georgia

I mean the reason. If I aint rattling.

Mac You've lost me.

Fern

A federal case! A federal case [is] nothing!

Georgia

The hell with it. I can't tell which is which on these freakin ponies.

Mac

Let me see. This is me. No no wait a minute. Yeah, yeah, that's right. I can remember the little sort of sunsuits we wore back then and how I didn't wanna wear--sissy I thought. God this is a relic. This is the last these kinda guys came around with a pony. "Take a picture on the pony?" Enterprising. Where'd that stuff go?

Fern

Into the black hole, asshole. With with with with federal case.

Mac

Try to be a good sport about it Fern.

Georgia

So sweet. Jimmy's little mouth.

Fern (uncomprehending) Sport?

(FERN grows still now, depressed shock overtaking the tears.)

Mac (He breaks in the following, but rallies toward the end.)

Both our mouths. You couldn't tell from only that. And Pop's got Marine picture round here somewhere. Saigon, some leave he had before...dress uniform. Sharp. Sword. Whole bit. He's anyway tough-looking, hard...but still the, you know, sweet mouth. Couldn't be cruel. Sometimes I think we're twins. Almost like, I mean.

And when I see the wall, my own face in the midst of all the names, the thousands u-upon thousands, my own face reflected there, with all the names behind and his name, my my my face upon HIS name, I think that maybe that I'll see his face too, Jimmy's, and then I'll know from him that everything's okay. And I will put my hands upon his face and my face too, covering up his name. Oh Lord! You see because I was in school, college, grad, I couldn't go. I, I should have been the one. I should be dead. Oh how I wish like when I see him sitting on a pony there and in my thoughts and walking dreams-- Instead, I stayed in school. But even so I had intention [to] sign up. At one point [I was] ready to sign but didn't for some reason and then, after...well, I didn't believe in it. And I was one of those against A the war and he was in it and it tore me up. I never was the same and no one was, here. Still does tear and why? Why?

I mean what did I prepare for that it couldn't wait? Fuckin seedy little junior high school teacher, worn-out tire, white all sticking out of it, the cord, that you can just throw away and who would care? Nobody gives a shit. Lousy car a little money. Grubby little materialist, ass falling out of his pants.

I I I I don't even think that car'll get to Washington no shit. But all those things back there coming at you all at once. Dear Christ! What could you do? What could you do? Too much, it was all too much for me.

(muses; rallies) But this is good! Teacher, Teachers' Room, he has his little subject, you know, and his little hobby, narrow-gauge H.O. trains...engineer cap watching them at night...talks endlessly, happy as a pig in shit. Oh how I yearn for such simplicity. Yearn! If only it had been clean cut: and I had been afraid. I know that sounds a little foolish now--not not not that I hadn't been a little...maybe fear turned first impulse aside, I just don't know. God you can't know anything. Nothing. You can't ever really know a thing. And yet, teacher I was talking about? He always knows. He never doubts! Knows everything he's doing and opinions [on] everything else! Simple fuckin tool!

Put em on a raft, the bunch, and send 'em out to sea. They'd be laughing [when the] sharks [were] slashing 'em to bits. Blood and froth and laughing in a wild-ass fury! Oh Jimmy! Oh my poor brother Jim.

Fern (whispers)

That explains it. Something.

Mac

I'm not trying to--

Georgia

Hey! (slamming album closed) you really should light into that old man when he gets out here! This kinda creepy sneaky stuff can rip the crap out of a person. Secrets? Who cares? What's the big freakin deal? My tribe says everything right out. Rip-roar! What's the use of keeping it inside? We call each other every kind of whore and whoremaster you can think of. Hey! Your cards are called. Like right away.

Fern

His kind of tribe you can only escape.

Mac

Yeah. Well. Blood's thicker than water, Fern.

Fern

So is shit.

Mac

I know it's been a sort of shaky thing for you, Fern. I don't know that I'm much better but I did get the shock first and by now--

Georgia

You're still shocked. Shaking anyways.

Mac

I don't know that it'll be all that much different. The old man says she still won't know us.

Fern

Yeah, there's very little difference between a dead person and a

live person. It's in the nuances.

Mac

Come on now.

Fern

Maybe if she saw us, even the year or so after she supposedly died, she'd recognize us better. Did you or that asshole in there ever think of that?

Mac

Gotta leave me out of this one. My hands were washed clean. I screwed up before, I know, but this one got shoved in my face.

Fern

You're like him.

Mac

Hey, I'm not like him. He may be a selfish little prick but he knows what he's doing.

Georgia

Now aint that respectful of your father? Him with good book in his hand every Sunday of his life. Anyways, since mama d-- whatever she did. It's funny when the facts aint facts. Kick in the ass really. But weird as it is it--somehow, I don't know--aint new. It aint new. Aint that the wildest shit?

Mac

Me? I'm three-quarters apart and losing it. Losing what I got left I kid you not. And this this wildest shit aint helping!

Georgia

You don't look no different than nobody else. You educated types you just think more about it. Or think you think--I don't know.

Fern

Your family!

Mac

Hey family is family. Mine is pretty much like anybody--

Fern

I'm not gonna let you get away with that. This this this this batshit crazy episode'll top anybody's-- This this this--!

Georgia

Logic you said before. Hey! I got it figured out now. Pop's afraid to come out.

Mac

Come on out now, Dad! Everybody knows. All is forgiven.

Georgia

Come out come out wherever you are!

Fern (to MAC)

Never! And I mean that. Get out here! You madman! Look at me! Look at me! I'm drooling. I'm...and don't even know it. Turning into...idiot!

Georgia

Takes the legs right out from under. Did me. But I'm all rightnow. Chalk it up to experience.

Mac (to FERN)

Come on now!

Georgia

Maybe some aspirin?

Mac

Hey! Fern! Come on now! You never let yourself go that far. Never! Take hold! You'll get smashed far worse than this I know it.

Fern

There's a rule then. You got a rule. One. Congratulations. A way to deal with what couldn't even be imagined! Could never even be imagined! (furiously shakes her head) Oooooooooo! God! No!

Georgia

After this they could. Imagine.

Mac

Now stop! Don't start making everything worse.

Georgia

Look out or they'll grab YOU up at Bide-a-Bit.

Fern

I... wouldn't [be the] first [they take from] this crowd.

Georgia

Hey I'm ready now. O take me to your lovin' arms Bide-a-Bit Crack, Whacko and Booze Hospital.

Mac

Big on all addictions! They were ahead of everybody!

Fern

Jesus Christ! Let's hear it for Bide-a-Bit!

Georgia

Oh hoh! Hot stuff! Right! Bide a BIT! Bide a BIT-IT-IT! I was a cheerleader. What else, right?

Mac

Money from everywhere.

Georgia

Of course.

Mac

But it's no big deal today.

Georgia

Crashin' being the fashion.

Fern

Your mother [was a] forerunner, fuckin pioneer. How proud we--!

Mac

I think Dad wanted to tell us much earlier but she was ashamed.

Fern

Ashamed to be living. [I can] understand that. Join join join this birdhouse family and hold on by [the] f-f-f-f- fingertips.

Mac

So who's holding on? I accepted insanity as the mode of normal living a long, long time ago. Think of how many times we can kill each Russian. The more that figure goes up the more normal things are.

Georgia

Did you ever hear such shit?

Fern

No! No! Never! No!

Georgia

Any more normal we'll explode.

Fern (slurred)

Fuck Russians. Forget Russians. Every little guy thinks [he's a] big deal, like Kissinger should call up. You think about things like that to keep away [from your] life.

Georgia

You all right, Fern? She all right? I think some booze'd be the ticket.

Mac

Hey! Listen! We'll meet Mama and it'll be hard but happy, believe me, and--

Georgia

The harder the happier I always say. I wouldn't mind a stiff drink neither.

Fern (rally)

Mac, you are nuts--but I think you got something, something lurking in there. You all do.

Mac

and you'll be surprised how soon you'll get used to the idea. It's like a bad practical joke is all.

Georgia

Did someone mention my life?

Fern

Your family might be the root cause [of] world horror.

Georgia

Don't flip, Fern. My mother walked the streets selling week-old newspapers. I mean you talk about mothers? Somebody told me she was alive I'd run and never stop.

Mac

She's gone out and come back in.

Georgia
Me? I'm always out. Out to lunch. But
good, cause I wanna talk to her later. Girl talk.

Mac

It's irrational enough to be true, poor Fern, but I'm holding
out for vice-versa. Save some face.

Fern

That's always too easy.

Georgia

It's all, whatchacallit, relative. Only thing I remember from
school. Taught us to say it's all relative.

Mac

That was the fashion in simpler times. When we understood
something. (two beats) Oh God! Jimmy. Jimmy. Jimmy.

Georgia

Poor ole lover--[at] least Mom's lucky enough to be alive.

Mac

Whew! Murder to juggle the two all right.

Fern

Yeah (two beats) he was pea-brain and he's dead.

Georgia

Cut it out, Fern!

Fern

I resent the Jimmies too. All the Jimmies!

Georgia

Hey! You wouldn't have a good word for God.

Fern

They don't try! Fuck 'em! Rats in a maze. The tragedy [is that] they think the maze is life, and they're grateful for it. Scumballs! And too stupid [to] know.

Georgia

She's been dead five times herself and she snaps back nasty!

Mac

You got the right verb.

Georgia

Don't even know which one's [a verb]-- Oh well. What's a cat got? Lives I mean?

Fern

Eat and shit and screw and [we're] suppose to admire and envy that? Or think [of] it as some sort of innocence that's beyond our worldly corruption? Oh my oh my.

Georgia

She's at it again, irregardless of mama.

Mac

You can be tolerant. You can always be tolerant. I always was. So he wasn't like us. You can still be tolerant about it.

Georgia

We're sure HE'S dead aint we? I mean around here--?

Fern

Innocence is evil.

Georgia

Fern, you do turn everything upside down. Take it easy.

Fern

I'll take it. I'll take it easy all right. And I'll take my misery over your bullshit anyday. You have bullshit you get w-w-w-what we're having now. It's a fuckin plague! Black death. Lies kill! Lies kill! Lies kill!

Georgia

Yeah? Well say what you want about Jimmy. He was a man!

Fern T

hen God help us. Any idiot [can] get an erection.

Georgia

I'm not just talking about Jimmy's--

Mac

We understand, Geor--

Fern

I don't. If there's such a thing as a man then it's you, Mac. Don't you see that you poor asshole? You you you you went in there and fought it day by fuckin day, and now you're so exhausted you don't think you're a man anymore. And now your father's trying to kill you off with this one, suck the life you got left. Again. And mama's going to commence again? She gave you a vacation. Hah! Listen to that! Listen to me! You're fuckin c-razy, Fern! What horrible horrible torture! Tumbling the whole wall down on us!

Oh Mac, you don't know what you are even after all these years, and some stupid...PILGRIMAGE [is] supposed to reveal something to you, some secret, oh yes!, SEEE-crit! to enable you to--go on. [To] gain some understanding. More bullshit. Like some cretinous radio preacher's little example.

There's no secret. None! You go on by doing more [of] what you've done. [Isn't that a] sensational message? That's what a man does, and woman. [That's] called courage. Or life. Or everyday. And you don't have to be pretty with a uniform and

prop sword.

Georgia

J-J-J-Jimmy did his own thing. He was a great guy!

Fern

Yeah! Right! So many great guys! Don't even remember him do you?

Georgia (sobs)

Mac

For God's sakes, Fern!

Fern

We don't remember him. We can hardly remember him. Even Mac. He's fading [from] you too. Just natural. I can't remember mama and she's alive. Alive! Holy shit! Life exceeds bullshit! Such happy happy horseshit! Even if Jimmy had been tons of substance [we] wouldn't--

Mac

Not true! Thousand things!

Fern

Well good luck to you and your thousand things. Or millions. Or fifty-eight thousand. What do I care? I'll give you what you want. I'm just here to give you what you want. My mission! You'll see! I'll make you equal to Jimmy and then you can forget all the nonsense forever.

And find some peace. And find some peace. Then we can relate to your totally totally totally fuckin insane crazy-fuckin-alive mother! (She seizes Magic Marker from table, leaps up, raises it over her head with both hands as if she is going to plunge it into MAC.)

Georgia (Escalating tone)

No-oooooooooooo! (Then FERN writes "MAC" in huge script on wall.)

Fern

There! Your name all by itself. All honor [to] you! You!
I'll get you fuckin rose. Hey! I'll get you sunflower! Larger
one than that, I'll get that. You, Mac! Life's [a] struggle,
not [a] jerkoff smile!

Georgia

The old man'll shit!

Mac

Fern! For Jesus Christ's sake!

Fern (fires marker into wall)

See that! Ninety-five miles per hour. I'm another Dwight
Gooden!

Georgia

Gross.

Fern

Where you going?

Mac

[To get] Mr Clean!

Fern

What else?

2 Waiting room. Enter FERN and GEORGIA.

Fern

Whew.

Georgia

Smells!

Fern

Didn't even notice.

Georgia

That I don't believe.

Fern

The day the dead live and I should sniff? I'd have to utilize the sliver of my brain that's left. I mean, worry about mere stinks in the presence of miracles?

Georgia

Then you must be dead. How could you help it? Gag! Puke!

Fern

You'd expect urine, wouldn't you? This is a dead-end convalescent home isn't it? For all the P.R. that is. The TV commercials showing the old loony-tunes weaving the basket of all our dreams.

Georgia

Urine huh? That's piss! And it's been, whatchacallit, aging.

Fern

Appropriately enough.

Georgia

Ugh! I really might puke. I don't even wanna walk around--even outside. Let's go. Yuk. PISS SMELL KAYOS STARLET. Why not flatter myself? (muses) Hey Fern. Ever notice that no ugly broad is ever murdered? "The statuesque blonde" really means enormous slob who fucked the town and was starting on the outskirts. Then she met Mr. Wrong.

Fern

Would that life were a tabloid.

Georgia

Too weird. Life that is. Listen, what's going on in there? I mean speaking of weird.

Fern

They're still working on mama. One minute she calls Pop, Pop, and the next --

Georgia

Dwight somebody when I could understand her. Some old one.

Fern

Eisenhower, this time.

Georgia

Christ!

Fern

Something she didn't resolve back then. Probably when she ate a birthday cake, candles and all. And speaking of gifts. (flips something aside)

Georgia

What's that?

Fern

[An] Altzheimer Honey gave it to me when we came in.
I was so out of it [I] didn't notice. Little rosette of shit.

Georgia

Now you've done it! You have duh-un it. Grossed me out. Why don't you go wash your hands at least?

Fern

When I can get up.

Georgia

I hope God never forgives you. I didn't think it was possible anymore for anybody to gro--

Fern

The truth'll do that. Too much of it.

Georgia

[If] I get like that, Fern, simple, blow my brains out, will you? You have my permission.

Fern

You come and you go, Georgia. I won't know you then. And I wouldn't want to be reminded of this day in any case. So where's that leave us?

Georgia

But I want to. Stay friends. I do.

Fern

What for? Get away from us. We're poison. We infect.

Georgia

You're not.

Fern

What can I offer? Stale wisecracks. Shit. Excuse the metaphor when the real thing's so close. I was totally bored with old Fern when this day cracked my skull open.

Georgia

You're excused right now, but the thing is we can talk. Even Mac.

Fern

Is that what you call it?

Georgia

Hey! So it's not Channel 13. In my family you scream or it's nothing. No one ever talks. I mean I'm...so lonely.

Fern

We waltz the streets of life alone.

Georgia

You didn't say that.

Fern

Thomas Wolfe the Former had the original impulse.
I fucked it up.

Georgia

You're strange Fern, or wanna be.

Fern

Why I came into this family, to look normal by comparison.

Georgia

Well, she aint fat no more anyways. You gotta say that.

Fern

Little trembly-white old lady.

Georgia

A killer. Don't know what I was expecting. Somebody...younger, tell truth. I pictured Mom, the mom Jimmy introduced me to. Disapproved my makeup. Lovely without anything she said. Me!

What I remember. Made her real. Oh God if I could stuff some cotton up my nose! Hospitals scare me even though this aint one really. Makes you think about...I mean you walk around inside your body, right? Don't think about it? And then come to place like this and nothing's really covered over here. People dying, really, right before your eyes. Some smell like dirt itself or worse. I think about my breasts and, well it aint like like standing in a certain way make sure some guy can get a view; I mean men are crazy 'bout--You see those women on TV news bare-breasted on some beach cause men can? Hey, one says, 's only tissue. We got more of it is all. Whatsay Fern? This only tissue, hey? I believe her and I don't, but gets the men completely nuts, that much I know.

But you know what I think about in all these places like this? I think about how you get cancer, breast, and have to-- Why I can't stay. 'Cause these places all are cancer and all horrible goddamn things.

Forty. Life begins. What crap! Death begins. O I get so scared. Let me tell you Fern, it's Death begins,

But Jimmy. Wow! Let me tell you. Said I didn't remember but there's one thing--but you're right. Don't remember much--flashes.

It...Jimmy...wouldn't've gone nowhere. Know that now. Know it from the other Jimmies. All wanted [to] hang on,

really. Breast. Suck, [be] babied. Oh how you get your heart set hard on something you don't even want! And then you die to have it, what you didn't even give two shits for first. Then you get walled-in and want the hell right out! Can't breathe!

Can't figure it. Can't figure nothing. Like you and Mac, so you aint perfect and fuck up, but you do have a hand on something, I don't know, can handle things--even this weird day which'd kill most people. And and and lunch Mac talks to waiter, asks about the wine, whatchacallit? "Sha-blee" the way Mac says it. Great! Like a little island at lunch, talk about everything under the sun. And yet we're heading to this awful place all the freakin time and everybody knows how awful it'd be and still could cool it, talk and laugh. Christ! Amazing. And I can hold my own, that's the beauty part. I know you'd say that was the craziest of all, we could stop for lunch and eat and anybody watching us'd think we're havin this nice time.

Fern

You're right. Mac got this free book on wines when he joined the Literary Guild. It's just a class thing that you so admire. You learn that there's an etiquette, too, in tragedy and in despair and pain. And even when you're dying. You smile, you eat, you listen to the others, you nod. I did at lunch but was in shock. If I behaved quite nnaturally I wouldn't have stopped screaming till I was carried off. When I think of it now, of mymind then, it--what I saw when we talked at lunch--was a battlefield, city full of black, smoking craters and people trying to get out of there on trucks,buses, all kinds of horrible screaming. I didn't hear of course, saw the mouths ripped open, frozen. This this this this was out the window, restaurant with the SUN blinding,in the parking lot, off the cars. And it became like movies I saw as a kid and everybody fleeing, Chinese, pushing homemade carts through bomb blasts and smoke and hanging onto tops of buses. Hundreds and thousands of people gonna be dead. And children. I was never in a place like that but I think I got one inside, you know, these images, pictures, and if something scrapes the surface it's it's it's all nightmare underneath and never stops, endless loop. Endless. Horrible forever.

Georgia

Holy shit!

Mac (entering)

Don't take it so hard, Georgia. We'll get ole Mom moving. Hey! Space Woman of New Jersey!

Georgia

Don't call her that. Don't you think she's been through enough?

Mac

All of us. Your wish is my command.

Georgia

I'll pass.

Mac

If you wish.

Georgia

You oughta learn something. You oughta listen to your wife for starters.

Mac

I have.

Georgia

Yeah, but you don't hear.

Fern

[I] wear out.

Georgia

You and your stupid burnout all the time. She'll be the one

who'll--

Mac

Well, she's forty. Before she caves in I'll trade her for two twenties.

Georgia

You're heading for something bad I think, Mac. Ask her about the...dream she has.

Mac

Georgia, my dear, it's bad every day. You get used to it. Be a man, hey? As for dreams. I don't need to bother. [I'll] just ask Metropolitan how long I'm going to live, throwing high blood pressure and C-over-C stress into the equation. They'll give me the number and on that birthday I'll blow my dreary brains out.

Fern

Why don't you just get out of that school? Why don't we get away from there? From that town and all the misery? Your father and now your--I can't even say the word.

Georgia

People oughta stay dead. It aint fair.

Mac

Sure! Woods and bunnies on half a stinking pension. Or become what? A Kelly-boy, your counterpart in the wolf from the door brigade. Thanks but no thanks. I'll stay at old Allowell. There's more dignity there believe it or not. I mean like one percent when the rest of the world runs on empty. If it kills me it kills me. Malox might prevent farting to death at least.

Georgia

Not a bad way to go here. Might speed up a few of the wheelchairs. That there's a joke everybody.

Fern (to MAC)

Yeah, well I'm stopping today's pretending right now. I'm overdrawn on nerves like right this very second. I can't hear any more from anybody. Nobody! Got to get home, [I] know that. Don't know how I'll get there; if you don't take me I'll call a cab.

Georgia

From here? Hundred with the tip!

Fern

I'll lose it if I don't--

Georgia

Hey, he don't take you I will--we'll split the fare. It's enough [to do] what we did today! I mean your mother's dead [and then] she aint dead. Give us a break. Go look at the roses and the wall with the two old nuts yourself.

Mac

Please! Come on! Fern! Trooper like you! We came this far, today andin LIFE!. I'll tell you, the doctors are most of the trouble. (imitates two doctors' voices)

She should go, best thing in world.

She maybe not just yet go.

Well, perhaps you take responsible.

What you think here Doctor Hong?

Maybe I don't know here Doctor Kong.

All this sounds at least understandable. The sentiments I mean, not the language. I mean, today's doctor, right? Ask him about a coughdrop, he's on the phone to a malpractice lawyer. But these particular pill pushers don't speekka duh English, not

really. It's not required in the slippery medical schools they were shot from; probably not required here anymore either.

Anyway we got rid of those two yapping medical fools who suck the Medicare tit I am positively sure! Pisses me to death these thieves! Thieves! Fuckin thieves!

Well...anyhow...he's softsoaping her in there and we'll be taking off in ten minutes guaranteed. Hey we've got to get there! It's important to everybody, not just me.

Trust me on this one, girls I can feel it in my bones. In my sunken bones! Get there in hour and a half and we won't stay long. Ten minutes be enough I know it. Please?

Georgia

No-o way, Ho-o-zay.

Mac

Listen! Get with it, Georgia. You're not the little gum-snapping tar[t]--

Fern

Mac!

Georgia

What was that word gonna be? I know some nice names too, and a lot of them are on walls. Your precious walls! (cries)

Mac

Aw come on Georgia! You're over forty! Cut the boo hoo shit! It's a joke. Nobody took Barbie or Ken away, did they?

Fern

Now you're simply being a prick.

Georgia

Yeah well I'll tell you one thing, joke-man! I'm fuckin glad Jimmy is dead. I coulda married into this goonball bunch.

Mac

Then celebrate his death at the wall. Come on!

Fern

You'll say anything, won't you?

Mac

I'm sorry--that I'll say anything.

Fern

The game has to be won.

Mac

Game? I don't think (two beats) so-- Couldn't think of so, hard word. Shit! I gotta keep it together, this trip! Don't know why. [Do] one fuckin thing right in my life maybe.

Fern

You've done many things ri--

Mac

Won't ask [you] name one.

Fern (weary)

Male. Keep banging your head against the wall. It won't fall down but you can show the blood.

Mac

Can I put that in [in]sight file? Sight file? Whatsamatta you, mouth? IN-sight file!

Georgia

I can tell you another place.

Mac

Fuckin alternator light keeps coming on but just test [of] almighty, right? Right! "Let's let's let's let's let's let's let's let's IRRITATE piss out [of] him!" God says. Irritate p--! We we we didn't (two beats) did it before [and] we'll do it. A-a-a-a-nother. [We did it before, we'll do it again.]

Georgia

Whaaaa--?

Fern

You flatter yourself. You really do. God and Mac.

Mac

Sin--, uh, sin--uh, pol, gies. Cere. [sincere apologies] GOD!

Fern

Sit down and catch a breath. There's no red hot male obligation to hold together anymore. Cry! For Jesus sake cry and let it out! Shout! Scream. The old caved-in nuts won't care here.

Georgia

I still aint goin and you can turn yourself inside fuckin out apologizing till you're blue in the face. So there!

Mac (lurching into GEORGIA)

I'm sor--

Georgia

Watch it Buster!

Mac

You! wahhhhhhhh[tch]!--(collapses into chair)

Georgia

Holy shit! He is looking sorta...blue!

Fern

Mac!?

Georgia

Holy shit!

Mac (unintelligible)

Fern

Honey?

Georgia

His face! All like silly putty or something. Jesus God!

Fern

Oh no! I should've stopped him.

Georgia

Purple-y...face.

Fern

Can you help? I--

Georgia

Should we slap him or something?

Fern

I don't know!

Georgia

What's that C. P. R.?

Fern

I don't know!

Georgia

I'll rub his neck.

Fern

Not too hard!

Mac

Stroh--ohhhhhh.

Fern

Oh why didn't he tell us sooner? About Mom? All the back and forth!

Georgia

Fern! Who cares? You better sit down!

Fern

No I--

Georgia

Shit he's turning--I don't know--all water or something!

Fern

What'll we do?

Georgia

What're we thinking about? We're numbnuts'es! Shit! Call a doctor! Doctor! Emergency! We need a doctor here forChrissake!

Fern

But Mac didn't like--

Georgia

Emergency! In here!

Fern

the two he met. He didn't, did he?

Georgia

Sit down Fern! Really! You can't order from the menu for Chrissakes.

Fern

Doctor! Oh it's my fault.

Georgia

No it aint. Don't be ridiculous. Shhhh! I think I can hear 'em coming--jabbering in several foreign languages. Yoh! In here! Doctor Rameriez-Hong!

Fern

We shouldn't've--

Georgia

been fuckin born! My uncle Freddy had something like this. It was whatchacallit, Ball's Palsy. (shakes her hand)

Mac

ohhhhhhh

Georgia

His hands [were] active enough before that. (demonstrating with both) Sorry.

Fern

Just keep him from falling! (now trying to get MAC sitting up straight in order to study his face) Can you feel anything, Mac? On the left side? This side?

Georgia

That's his right side; it's your lef--

Mac

ohhhhhhhh

Georgia

Hey, maybe it just looks worse than--

Fern

Stroke. I think. Oh God!

Georgia

Hey! You're no expert! I don't see no medical diploma hangin' from your ass! Come on! Could be virus or something or or or twenty-four hour flu? Oh where are those (shouts) DOC--!?

Fern (schoolteachery)

No, it's a stroke.

Georgia

No! Aint! Now just shut up! Everybody!

3 A Guidance Counselor's Office. She works on great piles of paper, shoves one onto chair next to desk.

FERN enters pushing MAC in wheelchair. He wears a suit and a sweatshirt with a college seal. Great difficulty pushing wheelchair over papers, books; shoving a chair aside. COUNSELOR ignores her plight at first.

Counselor (brightens)

Good bit of work!

Fern

Yeah, I'm getting better at it.

Counselor

Sweatshirt's a funny item...I mean, what with the fancy suit.

Fern

Catches the drool.

Counselor

Some...supplies?

Fern

Beside him in there. The one bottle of supplement lasts him the day--sucks it through straw. His head sorta naturally droops to it.

Counselor

Day? Do you expect us to buy more?

Fern

But I thought--?

Counselor

Who knows how long he'll be here?

Fern

But I'll be coming to take him home in the evening.

Counselor

Don't bother. Leave him with us. Just deliver a case or two of the supplement. He's sort of self-contained, no? Toilet also? Like a Winnebago.

Fern

But I don't understand.

Counselor

Soccer game or something? We'll shove him out as assistant coach, get him some overload pay.

Fern

But the man is almost d-

Counselor

School board doctor says he's fit for service.

Fern

Oh my God!

Counselor

Just what our union doctor said, but we gotta play the cards we're dealt.

Fern

Beyond belief.

Counselor

People think corruption is hand in till, but most of it is evils perpetuated with benign, even Christian, grins. A thief'll just rob you. Competently.

Fern

It'll kill him.

Counselor

Our doc says a few months, enough for you to get some caps on those teeth with the dental plan. Pretty teeth. So why not perfect?

Fern

Thank you.

Counselor

I got some facts and figures here for you. (looks) Some-um-where. Well the hell with it! In summary, it's better every which way if he dies in service--poor honey hit the wall, didn't he? Yoh! Mac! Out to lunch.

Fern

And if he doesn't die in service?

Counselor

God forbid.

Fern

Just keeps on going?

Counselor

Then we'll use his overload pay--chaperoning at the dances,
riding the bus to the planetarium--to buy back his army
time ...hayrides he'd be good for.

Fern

He was never in.

Counselor

Yeah he was, three almost four years--exact figure depends.

Fern

No way. He was jealous of his dead brother because--

Counselor

He'll be joining him. They can talk about it.

Fern

We can't lie about it.

Counselor

Don't you think the school board would lie? And the
superintendent? And the principals look the other way or lap it
up? If I had a dollar for every lapping principal--

Fern

All this is--

Counselor

War, Honey. Get used to it. You're out in the working world now, right? Full time? Toughen up!

Fern

I'm trying, but they look at you funny.

Counselor

I'm sure. And they wink when they hand you your submarine sandwich, right? And all the alleged "cute" stories at the water cooler?

Fern

Don't worry. I won't find my fun where I find my bread-- if indeed I ever find any fun at all. Too down to even think about anything like that.

Counselor

Save yourself the trouble. Talk out of their peckers. When you've known a few more than a few--as I have, believe me--you find it's all more the same than different. In the Biblical sense.

Fern

Forget it. Don't talk about it in any way shape or form. Don't want to be any deeper down than I am.

Counselor

I could take you way down in the alley.

Fern

I don't believe so, thank you anyway. I recognize that expression from the blues.

Counselor

Let's see about changing your major from that--in a manner of

speaking.

Fern

Mac'd love you.

Counselor

Maybe he'll get the chance.

Fern

He thought everything was--a matter of speaking.

Counselor

Forget it. He's a dead letter.

Fern

Still postage due I'm afraid.

Counselor

We'll pay it. (writing) Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. That has a nice ring. I'll fill out the rest of this later.

Fern

But somebody'll have to verify it there. won't they? And won't we be doing what they're doing? I mean the principals and the whole lying administrative shitload?

Counselor

We're recruiting everywhere, but we're still far behind the other side. At any rate, if he lasts six months, he can retire with full benefits. You can take him to Disney World--got some discount coupons here someplace. Nah, Great Adventure.

Fern

We've been.

Counselor

And forget the girl scout oath somebody belts you with baseball

bat what're supposed to do? Ask for it a little harder? What hubby here did? Being docile in this country is asking the Fortune Five Hundred, or however many rich-bitches there are, plus their mealy swarms of personal cocksuckers, to kick the living shit out of you.

Fern

Say it right out. Don't soft-pedal. (laughs) I used to be like you.

Counselor

I doubt that.

Fern

Now I hold back. And in some way shape or form I guess I'm working in the midst of that aforementioned swarm.

Counselor

Who could help it? But you don't have to Unca-Tom it either. Now this poor shlur here has really been through the wars so let's get him some retirememt credit, yes?

Fern

I still don't want to do anything dishonest, and my place is at his side.

Counselor

They always want you to know your place, don't they?

Fern

On the job training.

Counselor

Well your place is as far away from him as you can get; and these are dark days, Honey. Oh they're great for the guy who'll rape you while his buddies hold you down. But let's not talk history. Or Reagan.

Fern

Let's talk Mac.

Counselor

Hey! What did they do when he got his head bashed in by that jigaboo-spick-ghinny-reecan?

Fern

He didn't want to take a sick day.

Counselor

So he took a wall job. The principal hushed it up. The kid wasn't caught and therefore went on teacher bashing.

Fern

Well it wasn't Mac's fault.

Counselor

Sure?

Fern

Are you seriously--?

Counselor

Playing a little Devil's Advocate, but our devils don't play, my dear. And never underestimate what that ferocious head-smashing did to him.

Fern

He...was never quite the same. He talked the same...still had jokes, but--

Counselor

He was nice. If you're nice you fade into abstraction. If they remember you at all it's only to do a number on you.

Fern

I know there's a vein of truth but--

Counselor

I'm understating. If I told the whole truth I'd choke to death.
(chokes herself)

FERN looks around the office; after a beat, COUNSELOR follows her gaze.

Fern

Fine thing to die for.

Counselor

Did Christ do much better? Besides, some of the youngsters probably liked him and--despite the sabotage efforts of the country, the state, and the community--learned something from him.

Fern

I suppose. It isn't much.

Counselor

Many, grimly enough, are forced to be content with less in this land of the brave. Now let's see. (pulling out another form and writing) Two questions. Telephone skills, and foreign language proficiency.

Fern

Talks to his father in the evening. I just hear...creaks when he talks to me.

Counselor

He can answer the phone. We have a new system and anybody reaching him'll just assume another line's gone bad.

Fern

He studied Spanish for a month in Mexico.

Counselor

I'll put down fluent.

Fern

That's a laugh. We both went down there. Me for the sights.
The guy running it was from a bush little college in Iowa--

Counselor

So long as it's accredited it can be moronic through and
through.

Fern

and his one teensy ad in the A. F.T. newspaper drew five
students, one woman among them, so he saved a bit by renting
space in the worst neighborhood in the town. The whores were
pounding on the door before he checked attendance.

Counselor

Shall I finish? Soon a roll before lunch was considered, uh--?

Fern

Conducive to academic standards.

Counselor

Poor teachers! Have a party for 'em you gotta order twice as
much food and booze; if sex is on the menu and it's practically
free--?

Fern

Right. Gluttons. They were [while] in Mexico all right.
Counselor Middle class. Comes from always thinking you're
being ripped off. Naturally enough.

Fern (feigned shock)

Oh my!.

Counselor

You don't have to fake it. Or fake faking it. You come off as more innocent than he'd remember you, yes?

Fern

Accurate. As I said, I had to get a real job, and get along on it. So I play along and rest my brain.

Counselor

And that other woman, back there in the white, passionate heat of our penurious, down-and-dirty southern neighbor? Acrid dust, panting. Getting six to twelve credits.

Fern

She played it both ways, took on a dusky whore in the morning, one or more of the fellows who were still standing in the afternoon.

Counselor

A woman after mine own heart. Don't I wish! Did she have her doctorate?

Fern

Of course. But she still knew better than that.

Counselor

And would she give him a good reference? Another letter in his file wouldn't hurt. If only he had sucked a little more ass! Nobody's too good for politics. Don't make the same mistake yourself.

Fern

I hope I eventually have the strength to be just like him in that regard.

Counselor

Then don't throw the wheelchair out. Anyway, Dr. Whats-her-face amid the seamy musical beds?

Fern

She gave him a social disease; the whores gave him the A+ that's on his transcript.

Counselor

That could be considered good, no? From such professionals?

Fern

He dripped for the rest of the month and I drank.

Counselor

But you didn't leave him.

Fern

What for? So his cock is substituted for a brain?

Counselor

And you didn't seek revenge by--?

Fern

Too expensive. You gotta listen to too many assholes. Better the one you're married to. Oh my God when I think of it. When I think of it all! Hell, when I think at all!

Counselor

Don't bother. That's why I'm here--and the union.

Fern

His mother was dead and then she wasn't dead!

Counselor

Uh huh. Well that's too much family for me. Just keep it to yourself. We got enough trouble with Drooling Delbert here.

Fern

If it's going to be too much trouble I--
Counselor

Do you mind a very personal question?

Fern

Doesn't everybody?

Counselor

A question's not usually an answer. Ask Teach here.
(a beat) Never mind. (to MAC) Ever pop a wheelie on that
thing?...a little smalltalk what the hell.

Fern

Go ahead...she winced, did sensitive Fern.

Counselor

Ouch. Anyway, can he, uh, still get a hardon?

Fern

Come on now. I really don't wanna talk about such--

Counselor

Aw you come on, please. Between us antislut. Such a natural
curiosity. How could I be ashamed of it? How could you? Can
you, uh, shift him to a higher gear? Hmmmmm? (punches FERN'S
arm) Hmmmmmm little lady? [Is he] Porsche or Escort?

Fern

I really rather not--

Counselor

Give me a hint.

Fern

Let me off the hook on this one. Just this once.

Counselor

Bitsy-witsy hint?

Fern

I don't think so. In the concentration camp of the workplace,
I've taken to maintaining decorum.

Counselor

That's temporary, much of it at least. You don't feel free yet.
Now, since I'm taking him off your hands--? One extraordinarily
good turn, don't you think? Can he? Fern? Honey?

Fern

Is the pope an arab?

Counselor

Hmmph. Well...too bad cause (rising and then demonstrating) you
could use it to pull him along when you're sick of pushing.

Fern

(also standing up and demonstrating) Or r-r-r-ratchet him him
up a few notches so he can see all the luscious Lolitas passing
by that window.

Counselor

Don't they? It's a...fringe benefit of this job.

Fern

Might bring him back to life.

Counselor

How far?

Fern

Fifty percent wouldn't be that much different.

Counselor

Unfair, most men come up to that.

Fern

So I've noticed. In a former life.

Counselor

Hatrack? A useful use to be sure.

Fern

An idea.

Counselor

Make him a kind of Bauhaus fixture, Art Nouveau.

Fern

He used to say "Art is a fart blown through the asshole of time."

Counselor

That's only because Life is defunct, really.

Fern

Besides, he's not high up enough. A girl tosses things like this!

Counselor

Right! Like a sissy. Do it again.

Fern

Like this!

Counselor

Charming!

Fern

Thank you. It's what exercise should be--not much harder than breathing.

Counselor

And most feminine too.

Fern

I wouldn't know about that. Most of the time I feel exhausted and could care less how I look, or like some gawky boy.

Counselor

That's my department.

Fern

And the clothes don't help. These new clothes--I had to get something to go out to work every day.

Counselor

A shame the fairy designers didn't have Marylyn Monroe for another. But, show your body off anyway. Flaunt it Fern!

Fern

I sort of want to fall in between the Flaunt and the Mouse. What the bosses want. As I say, I used to use the left side of my a mouth for politics also, but I've learned to--

Counselor

bite your tongue, I know. But never mind them, the male-asshole-raised-to-the-asshole-power establishment.

Fern

You taught math!

Counselor

As a woman they wouldn't let me. Anxiety.

Fern

Oh?

Counselor

Yeah, I thought six inches was this long. (indicates short length with fingers)

Fern (pushing COUNSELOR'S fingers together)

Push them in further.

Counselor

No, I'll bring you out rather. Then I'll nail him up on the wall. Make it easier to toss your pretty Easter bonnet.

Fern

There I draw the line. That's cruel. I've been so smashed to shit that I can accomodate anything in my mind and even relish it, but doing [that]--?

Counselor

What, uh, might you be relishing now?

Fern

Lots of things I never even thought about before.

Counselor

Give me a hint cause I've thought about everything, believe me.

Fern

Couldn't begin.

Counselor

Well I'll tell you one thing. Once you do get it up it'll never go down again if you catch my drift.

Fern

Oh my!

Counselor

So don't worry about putting me out. If I cash in on that payoff I'll be happy enough.

Fern

Poor Mac. He won't enjoy it.

Counselor

Not likely. Any signal to his brain is liable to arrive around year 2050.

Fern (laughing)

Do you actually mean that you'd--? (the rest will be unintelligible.)

Counselor

I'll paint the principal's face on it, another schmuck.

Fern

How would I bury him? (hysterical and embracing COUNSELOR)

Counselor

Turn him over and screw him into the ground!

Fern

The Earth Mother every man seeks!

Counselor

Blindly.
(They are laughing, dancing with amazing slowness.)

Fern

Like moles.

Counselor (kissing FERN)

There! There's so much for you! The world is so much wider now.

Fern

I (two beats) don't know.

Counselor

A stroke. Of luck! Has given you a life. Renewal!

Fern

Neo-Fern.

Counselor

You must try everything! Literally everything!

Fern

Figuratively exhausts me. I'm getting tired just thinking of the one you seem to be, uh, suggesting.

Counselor

Such cautious language. How male.

Fern

Coitus (pulling away) interruptus. (FERN gets the wheelchair between them, moves it as COUNSELOR chases her.)

Counselor

Really, dear, I just represent life, and he can no longer pose between you and life.

Fern

Well, just a little while longer.

Counselor

Don't be afraid, I represent the union too.

Fern

I appreciate that but can't we kinda keep things separate?

Counselor

Men don't have such nice concerns. They do whatever gives them erections. It's your turn.

Fern

Yes. I see. I think I see anyway. Or don't. Six of one, half-dozen of the other.

Counselor (tossing it)

Here's the key to my apartment. I do hope you don't think that I'm too forward. I have to be aggressive for the union, of course, but on my own time I just like to cuddle up.

Fern

I couldn't.

Counselor

Most people can't but they eventually get to it--no matter what it is.

Fern

I'll keep this but I'm not making any promises--and nothing ever in front of--(nodding)

Counselor

What do you take me for?

Fern

I just want it to be clear.

Counselor

Besides, that's the big time. We want to start small.

You've been so educational.

My job. Speaking of whiiiiii-ch. (Returns to desk; FERN comes outfrom behind wheelchair.)

Don't be modest. You're always willing to give more. Serve.

You've got it. And so sweetly! Perceptive and lovely.

Be gentle with him.

I promise. With you too--at first. (taking pen back and not letting go of FERN'S hand.)

You're too...(jerking hand loose) kind.

Not at all.

A friend in need.

So sweet.

Fern

So many people today won't put themselves out.

Counselor

Don't mention it. And I'm sorry if I--

Fern

Do I look all right?

Counselor

Walk away from me.

Fern

Like this?

Counselor

Is that natural?

Fern

Like everything else. Yes and no.

Counselor

I'd like to take both of you around the world.

Fern

Mac and me?

Counselor

You and you.

Fern

You're so forceful!

Counselor (advancing again as FERN
withdraws even more rapidly, exits)

I've another side too.

Fern (off)

You'll show it to Mac?

Counselor

Put it right in his face.

Fern

Just know you two'll be great friends!

Counselor [It'll be] like a--
(shoves wheelchair and MAC tumbles to the floor.)

Fern

What's that I heard?

Counselor

Music. Love song.

Fern

Lovely!

Counselor

--like a honeymoon.

Fern

Aces!

Counselor

I'll carry him over the threshold.

4 GEORGIA on the phone, simultaneously cutting her toenails--could use an extra hand. She is dressed in a long t-shirt. FERN at aerobics class, moving, it would seem, a beat behind everybody else. They are separated by flimsy wooden crates. MAC, in wheelchair, is in another such little island.

Georgia

Yeah? Well you're wrong. Georgia knows herself all right. More of a wallflower. That's right. Shy. A shy one that's me. A busy shy one if you get me. I mean lots of activity but still you don't change. You stay the way you was.

Do what? Well that's a first. I thought I'd heard everything and tried most. I'd be dead if I had good sense. Uh huh. Well I'll tell you one thing: you heat up that sexed-up brain anymore [it]'ll explode.

Date? Sorry but I'm busy till 2000. Take a number. Anyways, I'd feel funny using that word. Date! Kiss MY ass. What?! Just an expression. Boy!

Oh? Both before it and after it? Whew! That's quite a promise I'd say. I'd have to consult with my cute young doctor--see if I'm up to it. Or him. Or he's up.

Listen! That other family member I knew didn't promise anything but he delivered--if I can remember correctly--and some stuff kinky for its time. Anyways, lots of great events [have] come and gone. Water under the bridge. And assholes. No! Not under the bridge. You know what I mean.

Hey! That's enough! Now slow it down! And talk is cheap, Old Baby. Now don't repeat yourself. Uh huh? I got that the first time. And too bad I did.

Don't hit me over the head I always say--I wanna be conscious to enjoy it. (a few beats)

No I don't get it--and if I do it aint funny.

I'm gonna get it? Oh don't I have to watch what I say? Holy Crap it's like junior highschool everything dirty. Like the Allowell School I guess. Well of course I don't have a ruler right here. Do you? Idiot.

Love is like football, a game of inches? Yeah? It's like football all right, complicated and dirty.

But real love talk don't have to be that dirty, fella. It has whatchacallit, ceased being funny. Now I'm gonna hang right up if you don't--

(From this point on, FERN 1) exercises more vigorously, 2) sarcastically imitates a rigorous young instructor, 3) makes faces in reaction to a scolding, 4) slows her actions drastically when the instructor's back is obviously turned, speeds up when being observed again, then 5) imitates the mincing quality of the instructor's departing walk.

(Each action can stop the flow of GEORGIA'S words, even though we can still see her talking in the silence, simultaneously concentrating on trimming her toenails, sometimes placing the receiver a foot or two away.)

Georgia (cont)

Hey! That's real nice. I take back half of what I thought.
I walk in beauty like the night, right? Will you read me the whole book? That's better. It might cure the sex on your brain.
Your sauteed brain. Hey I love it! I should write songs. Liver and onions. What else is sauteed? SAUTEEING: KEY TO KITCHEN SUCCESS--Food Section of Times or something. --"How sauteeing saved my marriage." Poisoned my boyfriend.

Listen. Now listen. If we're gonna do it--and we aint, fars I know--we'll eventually get to it. Don't worry so much. You aint gonna die, [at] least not today. And if you do, well that just one little bit of heaven you're just gonna miss. Then you can ask that other member of your family what it was like. So hot he left it, right? Glory does weird things. (covers mouthpiece with hand) GLORY'S WEIRD SAYS DEAD MARINE--National Enquirer.

Now don't take off on weird. If we do it we'll stay, whatchacallit, convention--at least for a while, hey?

Convention-AL? Thank you. I wanna talk good English--I mean after the shit you talk I'll wanna bath in a minute.

Whew! Do you think up those slimy things by yourself or--? Good girls go to heaven and bad girls go everywhere? Well that's cute. Where'd you hear that one? Go on! The stuff you make up's at the bottom of the garbage pail. Bumper sticker? Well they do come up with them. Well now I don't know. Maybe somebody could make up a bumper sticker about a girl doesn't know one moment to the next whether she'll be good or bad. Have to be big bumper. (beat) But sometimes I know.

SHE KNOWS AND SHE DON'T KNOW--New York News. That's not a good one is it? Oh? I might keep you around [if] you keep up the compliments. Oooooops.

Well now that isn't a compliment. It is and it isn't. Listen! How about all this church work you're supposed to be doing? Uh huh. Get out! I heard that one before. Gotta test some sin out [to] get to know the enemy? And I'm the sinful vessel, right? A bible verse and then they get worse. And blame us for your fantasies [the] way you blame the faggots for your other ones. And beat 'em up. Poor bastards, they can't win for losing.

I had some AC-DCs and they were the sweetest. Sautee a little something in the pan--I remember that from recipes. Just a hobby if you ask me. Cooking? Nah, I mean religion for a lot of people today. Tomorrow [it]'ll be something else. Hang-gliding or something.

No I never heard of Hung-gliding, but would you believe that I enjoy that role? Sinful vessel I mean. Not always, but sometimes it's as good as a hot-fudge sundae or something. No, don't bring one over. I'm unavailable.

SINFUL VESSEL--LOCAL GIRL LOVES IT!

(Someone shoves MAC and wheelchair into the crates.)

There he goes again! I'll tell you you better bring a nice present [if] you do come over here, [after] forcing me to listen to all this warped shit.

You will? From Fredericks? What? Just leave the receipt in there and I'll know how much to give you back. That stuff must cost a thousand bucks a pound it's so-o flimsy. Model? I try things on for myself--if you happen to be here--?

Hey! See-through pee-through, what do I care? I can't believe I'm saying this to you. (a beat) Oooops! Sounds like a heart attack. Gurggle gurggle. You take your pills? Oh oh. Now don't talk when you're dying. Didn't your mother ever teach you nothing?

What's that? Don't need pills for anything. Nothing, huh? Terrific.

Oh no! Uh uh. No more bragging. Uh huh? Yup. No more bragging, and no more gagging. All right?

Yeah. Uh huh. Well you just bring that old man's shrunken pee-whizzle over here and we'll see. SHRUNKEN PEE-WHIZZLE'S AMAZING!--The Star.

Uh huh. Yup. I said! We. Will. See. Not!
(GEORGIA laughs and hangs up, FERN collapses and flings her headband away, a crate falls just after BLACKOUT.)